Irony of ironies?: 'Meta-disparagement' humor and its impact on prejudice

by

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Abstract

"Meta-disparagement" humor refers to jokes that explicitly target a minority while implicitly ridiculing those who would laugh at the joke at face value. Through the use of irony, an implicit bigot is summoned as the true joke target. But at an explicit level, these jokes are offensive perpetuations of stereotypes. Thus, while meta-disparagement humor purports to undermine stereotypes, it may in fact reinforce and perpetuate them. Using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, this dissertation investigates this possibility vis-à-vis humor that targets women, blacks, gay people, and Arabs. A discursive textual analysis of this type of humor in popular television series reveals that meta-disparagement humor most often derives from "hyperbole of prejudice" to ultimately critique political correctness. For all four groups, meta-disparagement humor is a double-edged phenomenon, indulging in stereotypes to ridicule them. A quantitative content analysis of the same television series determines the prevalence of and power dynamics embedded in this type of humor. A survey establishes baseline attitudes towards these groups. Finally, a series of six experiments tests the effects meta-disparagement versus direct disparagement humor of the four groups of interest on attitudes towards these groups using a variety of outcome variables. Overall, the experiments point to negative effects of this type of humor, such that stereotypes are more salient and impact subsequent judgments.

Chapter 1 – Defining and Motivating Meta-Disparagement Humor

On a 2010 episode of *30 Rock*, fictional black TV star Tracy Jordan declares, "Old school racism is back." Toofer, the sole black writer for Jordan's show-within-a-show, asks, "How can racism be back when we elected a black president?" Jordan responds, "Barry Obams [sic] is the one who brought it back." This leads Toofer to conclude, "So you're saying that racism is back because white people no longer feel sorry for us?" This bit comically highlights a potential problem of a "post-racial" society that has allegedly achieved the goals of the Civil Rights movement. The election of Barrack Obama accelerated this shift toward supposed post-racialism, as perceptions of racial discrimination in the United States decreased by ten percent within a month of his election (Valentino & Brader, 2010).

While Jordan and friends then lament the implications of post-racialism to include the demise of affirmative action, losing Queen Latifah as a Cover Girl, and the return of white judges to *Law & Order*, their list of woes also includes a faux security system commercial featuring a black perpetrator. The scene cuts to show this commercial that ends with the white female victim screaming, "Black man!" This bit embodies what I have termed "meta-disparagement" humor. This joke is explicitly racist but, taken in the context of Jordan et al.'s discussion, the viewer is to understand it as an indictment of racism. That is, a problem as complex and deep-rooted as racial resentment does not disappear overnight. The over-zealous push to post-racialism in

fact opens the door to racism. Meta-disparagement humor is one such manifestation of racism in a post-racial era, as it both trades in and challenges prejudice.

Meta-disparagement humor is the concept I use to refer to jokes that explicitly target a marginalized group while implicitly ridiculing those who would laugh at such jokes. The bigot is summoned as the true joke target via irony, thereby deflecting responsibility for the politically incorrect content. A skit from *Da Ali G Show* in which Sacha Baron Cohen interviews a professor of gender research as his pseudo-gangster persona Ali G offers another example. During the skit, Ali G asserts he would not feel safe being driven by a woman, playing on the stereotype that women are bad drivers. The audience laughs – presumably not at the women targeted by Ali G's joke, but at Ali G's sexism – yet, the joke explicitly resurrects a sexist stereotype. Meta-disparagement humor uses irony to deflect responsibility for politically incorrect content. Taken at face value, these jokes are offensive perpetuations of stereotypes. Thus, while meta-disparagement humor purports to ridicule stereotypes and those who use them, it may, in fact, reinforce and perpetuate them.

Although the above examples focus on race and gender, the concept of meta-disparagement humor can apply to any group dimension with a history of discrimination or about whom stereotypes exist. This is because the jokes trade on stereotypes in the common vernacular so that the true target can be prejudice against these groups. Thus, a system of stereotypes and de facto prejudice must exist for this type of humor to operate. This can also be ingroup deprecation, as in Jordan's joke above. Jordan is a black man make fun of blacks to make fun of racism. In fact, ingroup membership can be

a key cue to audiences that the joke is ironic. Successful meta-disparagement humor therefore intends to be ironic and makes its ironic intention clear, allowing the anti-prejudice meaning to emerge through the explicitly problematic invocation of stereotypes.

As suggested by Jordan and friends, this type of humor appears to be a symptom of post-racialism, post-feminism, and a larger climate of post-political correctness. This dissertation, therefore, seeks to understand how meta-disparagement humor can be simultaneously progressive and politically incorrect, focusing on its effect on audience levels of prejudice. When irony is invoked in conjunction with disparagement humor targeting marginalized groups, potential problems arise. Throughout the dissertation, I focus on meta-disparagement humor that targets blacks, women, gay people, and Arabs given both the popularity of these groups as targets and the varied levels of prejudice towards them. Using mixed methodologies that draw from both the qualitative and quantitative traditions, and speaking to the moment of encoding and decoding, paints a comprehensive picture of this phenomenon.

This dissertation takes a multi-methodological approach in order to understand meta-disparagement, focusing on meta-disparagement that targets women, blacks, gay people, and Arabs. The first three chapters lay the theoretical groundwork by identifying the relevant literature and then considering the content of meta-disparagement humor through a discursive textual analysis and quantitative content analysis. A survey also establishes the foundation by identifying societal attitudes towards the groups of

interest. A series of experiments then tests the hypotheses developed by the theory building.

Specifically, the current chapter defines meta-disparagement and roots the phenomenon and its potential effects in the literature, also drawing from current events to highlight its cultural relevance. Chapter 2 presents a discursive textual analysis of the mechanisms of meta-disparagement humor in six popular television series. I propose the concept of "hyperbole of prejudice" to capture the trend whereby stereotypes are exaggerated to the point of ridiculousness, ultimately inverting these stereotypes. Hyperbole of prejudice thus encapsulates the core of meta-disparagement humor: stereotypes must be indulged in before they can be challenged. The textual analysis suggests that this type of humor varies by series type and targeted group. While meta-racist and meta-sexist humor tend to be the most "successful," as irony supersedes malice, they are, nonetheless, nuanced in their invocation of irony and intention. As noted above, success requires irony be intended and received. Gay people and Arabs tend to receive less ironic treatment, such that the humor dwells more on the explicit, homophobic and xenophobic levels than the ironic, progressive plane. Regardless of the target, the two levels inherent to the meta-disparagement humor definition detailed in Chapter 2 are not discrete, distinct entities but ends on a spectrum, such that comedian and viewer alike can move fluidly between them. The double-edgedness of this type of humor also creates a critique of political correctness that questions blind adherence to this ideal void of its egalitarian core.

Chapter 3 expands and quantifies the findings of Chapter 2 with a content analysis, while also establishing baseline levels of societal prejudice through the use of a survey. The content analysis reveals that women are most likely to be joke tellers and targets of both non-meta-disparagement humor and meta-disparagement humor, followed by blacks, gay people, and Arabs. The proportion of tellers and targets does not vary by humor type. All four groups are more likely to be joke targets than tellers, speaking to the power differentials embodied in humor. The survey in Chapter 3 indicates it is significantly more acceptable to make fun of women than blacks and gay people, mirroring the position of women as the most common joke target of the four groups. Survey responses also suggest that Arabs, followed by gay people, blacks, and women are perceived to face the most discrimination, the inverse of the frequency of joke target. Further, while participant responses suggest discrimination against Arabs to be more justified than that against the other groups, Arabs were the least common joke targets. Taken together, these findings speak to the idea that discrimination and humor, both with and without irony, are not one in the same.

The next three chapters shift focus to the effects of this type of humor on prejudice. Chapter 4 measures the effect of sexist and meta-sexist humor on stereotype activation and application. A Lexical Decision Task suggests both sexist and, more so, meta-sexist humor, may activate sexist stereotypes. The stereotype application, in which participants evaluated a potential job candidate, did not suggest differences by humor exposure.

Chapter 5 compares the effects of direct and meta- disparagement on support for policies concerning the disparaged groups. Study 1 looks at humor that targets gay people. Results suggest that exposure to direct anti-gay humor decreases support for gay rights, regardless of baseline homophobia. Meta-anti-gay humor did not have a main effect on support for gay rights but did marginally decrease support for other minorities (immigrants, Arabs, Muslims, and blacks). Lower levels of baseline homophobia attenuate this main effect. This suggests a backdoor effect, whereby purportedly progressive meta-disparagement humor may not be detrimental to the group it ironically targets, but may invoke prejudice toward other groups, or what I call "super spreading activation theory." Study 2 replicates Study 1 but instead considers humor that targets Arabs. Results suggest that exposure to meta-anti-Arab humor decreases support for Arab rights. Direct anti-Arab humor, on the other hand, decreases support for other minorities (immigrants, gays, and blacks) and depends on baseline Arab prejudice, again supporting "super Spreading activation."

Chapter 6 considers the role of comedian group status in the context of meta-racist humor. Specifically, two experiments tested the effect of comedian race in delivering meta-racist humor on Symbolic Racism, perceptions of discrimination, and evaluation of a black versus white mayoral candidate. The only significant finding suggests that watching a white comedian make meta-racist jokes marginally increases perceptions of discrimination. It seems because it is a white comedian delivering racist jokes, however ironically, viewers in turn realize that racism is still a problem.

The conclusion offers a summary of the empirical work. I highlight the key contributions of each chapter and this line of research as a whole. I end by considering the larger implications of the results. In the end, I argue that meta-disparagement humor holds the potential to pierce the veil of an era of supposed post-prejudice, if its problematic nature can be recognized first. Thus, meta-disparagement humor is the ultimate irony of ironies

Next, I move to an overview of the relevant literatures, further developing the concept of meta-disparagement humor along the way. Specifically, I draw from the humor and stereotyping / prejudice literatures. I also cite relevant current events to further illustrate the phenomenon. This literature review will set the stage for the subsequent empirical chapters.

Literature Review

Humor

This section provides an overview of the humor literature as it relates to meta-disparagement humor. I begin by defining disparagement humor and meta-disparagement, citing recent controversies pertaining to each as further motivation for this line of inquiry. I then move to the three main theories of humor, which leads to a discussion of relevant work on stereotyping and prejudice.

Disparagement Humor. Disparagement humor refers to jokes "in which one party is victimized, belittled, or suffers some misfortunes or act of aggression" (Hobden & Olson 1994, p. 239). Mainstream news media often cover disparagement humor with reports on controversy sparked by jokes leveled at minorities in a variety of contexts.

For example, in March 2012, syndicated Conservative talk radio show host Rush Limbaugh called Sandra Fluke, a Georgetown law student and supporter of insurance-covered contraception, a "slut" and "prostitute" during an interview. Limbaugh further suggested Fluke upload sex videos of herself for the public to see (Shapiro, 2012). In his apology, Limbaugh stated, "My choice of words was not the best, and in the attempt to be humorous, I created a national stir" (Donvan, 2012). Fifty advertisers nonetheless pulled out as sponsors of his show. In 2007, radio personality Don Imus, known for his sharp tongue and acerbic wit, referred to the Rutgers University women's basketball team as "nappy-headed hos" (Carr, 2007). Public outrage ensued, resulting in an apology from Imus' broadcaster NBC and Imus' temporary suspension (Carr, 2007). Longtime Clippers' announcer Ralph Lawler likewise came under fire when he joked about player Maed Maddadi's Iranian citizenship, asking, "You're sure it's not Borat's older brother?" (Associated Press, 2009). While Lawler was also suspended, Clippers' player Baron Davis defended his remarks as "entertainment" (Associated Press, 2009). The actors in these cases tried to deflect responsibility for their disparaging comments by highlighting the humorous intent.

Anti-gay statements reframed as humor to counter claims of homophobia have received particular attention media attention. In January 2012, CNN's Roland Martin came under fire for anti-gay tweets posted during the Super Bowl. Martin demanded beatings for men who liked an advertisement featuring scantily clad soccer phenomenon David Beckham (Wemple, 2012a). After attempting to label his statements jokes about soccer and later about men liking men but "in jest," CNN suspended him

(Wemple, 2012b). Quebecois sports announcers Alain Goldberg and Claude Maihot stirred similar controversy during the 2010 Vancouver Olympics with their remarks about figure skater Johnny Weir (Sager, 2010). The pair made fun of Weir's costume and body language, concluding Weir belonged in the women's competition (Sager, 2010). Prompted by a complaint by the Quebec Council of Gays and Lesbians, the parent company issued an apology but did not penalize the announcers (Sager, 2010). In 2011, film producer Brett Ratner exclaimed, "Rehearsal is for fags" in an interview, leading to his resignation as producer of the Academy Awards (Sperling, 2012). And, as will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 5, Vince Vaughn and Tracy Morgan came under fire in 2010 and 2011, respectively, for anti-gay jokes.

In these examples, the media figures hid behind humor, believing this cover to be better than non-comedic statements. But disparagement humor increases tolerance for discrimination against stigmatized groups among those already prejudiced (Ford & Ferguson, 2004), in the context of experiments in which participants told jokes about lawyers (Hobden & Olsen, 1994) and Canadian Newfoundlanders (Maio, Olson, & Bush, 1997). In a summary of work on disparagement humor, Martin (2007) claims that, while telling disparaging jokes is associated with elevated levels of prejudice, hearing these jokes is not. The present research builds on this previous research by expanding to additional groups – women, African Americans, gays, and Arabs – in the context of meta-disparagement humor, which adds the complication of irony.

Irony is defined as a situation in which "the speaker expresses a statement in which the literal meaning is opposite to the intended meaning" (Martin, 2007; 13). The

invocation of irony to deflect responsibility for problematic disparagement humor, as well as the misinterpretation of ironic satire, suggest the comedic form is quite subtle. When irony is introduced to disparagement humor, an explicit group target remains, while an implicit target is also presented. The explicit targets of meta-disparagement jokes are typically marginalized groups. The implicit targets, invoked ironically, are those who would laugh at the explicitly disparaged group.

The implicit target of meta-disparagement humor can be indicated in a variety of ways. The tone of voice, facial expression, body language, and /or background information about the political or social views of the joke-teller can signify irony. For example, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* features African American correspondent Larry Wilmore, a.k.a., the "Senior Black Correspondent." Although this title is explicitly racist, it implicitly seeks to ridicule those who would employ tokenism. This "tongue-in–cheek" disparagement extends to Wilmore's work for the series. In his piece "N word," Wilmore asks an African-American councilman trying to ban use of the N word, "What if I said, 'n----- please'? Now that's just being polite." In both cases, Stewart's liberal politics and Wilmore's association with Stewart, as well as his African American identity, allow the meta message of the joke to be realized. Chapter 2 details the techniques of meta-disparagement humor in situ. Chapter 6 manipulates comedian race to determine if the effect of meta-racist humor is larger for black than white joke tellers.

Two concepts are critical to understanding meta-disparagement humor and its effects: encoding, or the meaning embedded in a text by its producers, and decoding, or the meaning an audience extracts from a text (Hall, 1980). The irony of successful meta-

disparagement must be understood in both the moment of encoding (by the joke teller and other producers) and decoding (by the audience). Ultimately, meta-disparagement humor requires an inversion of Hall's (1980) three possible audience readings – dominant, negotiated, oppositional; as producers of meta-disparagement humor encode opposition and thus assume an oppositional reading to the explicit message. In this process, the oppositional becomes dominant. By the same token, reading the joke at face value, or the explicit dominant message, is oppositional to the author's true intent. Further, the audience may inhabit two reading positions at once – understanding the irony but also taking in the stereotypes.

Scholars have begun to explore the contours of meta-disparagement humor, without calling it such. Gruner (1978) considers ironic disparagement vis-à-vis comedian Dick Gergory's jokes about African Americans: "On the first day of integration a black man gets on a bus and sits in a front seat. The driver is so angry he drives around town backwards. This story exemplifies the frustrated anger of the Southern 'redneck' and the stupidity which it leads to. The white is ridiculed, not the black... White bigotry, in terms of restrictive covenants and outright discrimination, is the target" (p. 13). Gray (1995) proposes a similar conception, as he theorizes about the role of ambivalence in decoding racial humor that exaggerates in order to undermine stereotypes (Glebatis, 2008). Means Coleman likewise (2000) considers audience confusion resulting from ironic disparagement vis-à-vis *In Living Color,* as she writes: "these street-style, ghettocentric characterizations… ha[ve] the potential to confuse non-Blacks… Blacks, too, seem confused about whether to laugh at the stereotypical images created by Black

image makers" (p. 73). Douglas (2010) offers a glimpse of this phenomenon as it applies to sexism. Douglas theorizes that hyper-sexist media content is enabled by the illusion of post-feminism and irony, creating what she defines as an era of "enlightened feminism." Or, as Douglas mocks, "Take that you humorless feminists: the producers' intention is not *really* to take women back to the Stone Age, it's actually to exaggerate and then mock what patriarchy stands for so we all have a good chuckle" (p. 211).

Taking a broader context than ironic racism or ironic sexism, Ford and Ferguson (2004) similarly assert, "that the social context may cue a benign meta-message of the humor. For instance, a person might approve of disparagement humor...in a context in which he or she knows that the humor source is intended to lampoon rather than support social stereotypes" (p. 84). The concept also appears to be known and discussed by practitioners. In a 2009 interview with *60 Minutes*, British comedian Ricky Gervais responds to interviewer Leslie Stahl's questions about his controversial jokes that take such targets as the Holocaust and kids with cancer, saying, "The target is prejudice or myself; I play a man who plays the idiot" (Buddenhagen & Bar-On, 2009).

Those who come under fire for making offensive statements have taken note. Recent high profile examples of backfiring disparagement humor illustrate the invocation of *ironic* humor to deflect responsibility. In 2005, for example, *Jyllands-Postem*, a conservative Danish newspaper, and later Norwegian Christian newspaper *Magizinet*, printed a series of cartoons drawn by multiple artists depicting Muslim prophet Muhammad (Anderson, 2006). The cartoons incited outrage in the Middle East and among pockets of Middle Easterners living elsewhere, not only for negative

representations of Islam but for simply depicting Muhammad, an act forbidden in the Muslim faith (Anderson, 2006). The newspapers deflected blame by claiming the cartoons' true target not to be Islam, but intolerance of Islam (Anderson, 2006). In December 2010, five men living in Sweden with direct ties to the Middle East were arrested, with four later convicted, for planning a gun attack on *Jyllands-Postem* in retaliation for the cartoons ("Denmark Holds," 2010; "Four Guilty," 2012). In the same month, blasts in Stockholm were linked to the cartoons (Anderson, 2010).

In April 2010, an episode of *South Park* similarly featured the prophet Muhammad dressed in a bear suit (discussed in more depth in Chapter 2), leading jihadist, New York-based RevolutionMuslim.com to issue a warning. The extremists cautioned *South Park* creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker that insulting depictions of this sort would lead to their death, à la Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh. The post included the address of Comedy Central and South Park productions, as well as graphic pictures of Van Gogh ("Jon Stewart stands," 2010; Leo, 2010). To avoid further controversy, Comedy Central responded by heavily censoring the episode. Recognizing the intended irony, other comedians came to *South Park*'s defense. Jon Stewart directly attacked Revolution Muslim, joining with a choir to serenade them with "Go F--- Yourselves" ("Jon Stewart stands," 2010). *The Simpsons* responded in more muted fashion: during the opening credits, Bart's chalkboard message reads, "South Park- We'd stand beside you if we weren't so scared" (Barrett, 2010). In this *South Park* example, we thus see fellow comedians standing by *South Park* as the jokes launched at Islam are intended to be ironic, an irony unappreciated by Revolution Islam.

Moving from irony used to deflect responsibility to misinterpreted irony, U.S. speed skater Shani Davis lashed out against satirist and U.S. speed skating benefactor Stephen Colbert's jokes about Canadians on his series *The Colbert Report*. For example, Colbert called Canadians "syrup suckers" and "ice holes," (Pastrorek, 2009). Another perhaps more disconcerting example of misinterpreted ironic disparagement occurred in Calabasas, CA in 2009. Middle school students enacted "National Kick a Ginger Day" via Facebook (Kim, Blankstein, & Winton, 2009; Winton, 2009). At least eight students participated in the violence against redheads, inspired by a *South Park* episode claiming redheads lack souls (Kim, Blankstein, & Winton, 2009; Winton, 2009). Reporting on the story, *Los Angeles Times* reporter Richard Winton noted that, despite the youthful misinterpretation, *South Park* episode actually sought to ridicule prejudice (Winton, 2009). These examples illustrate the importance of encoding-decoding: the ironic intention of the Dutch cartoonists, Stephen Colbert, and *South Park* producers was misinterpreted by subgroups of the Muslim community, Shani Davis, and Calabasas middle school students respectively, to detrimental effect.

Moving outside the realm of news stories, there is a small body of research on the effects of meta-disparagement humor, again without calling it such. Vidmar and Rokeach (1974) investigated Norman Lear's attempt to challenge racial stereotypes and bigotry with *All in the Family*, a situation comedy centered on "loveable bigot" Archie Bunker. Because Bunker's racist comments came with a wink and a nudge to the audience, the audience was invited to laugh at, not with, Archie. The show was both critically lauded for broaching the subject of prejudice and criticized for perpetuating

stereotypes (Tate & Surlin, 1976; Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974). With a survey, Vidmar and

Rokeach (1974), find that exposure to Bunker's hateful speech decreased racism among

racially progressive viewers, while boosting racist sentiment among those already racist.

This provides support for the Selective Perception Hypothesis, which posits that

audiences will take meanings commensurate with their predispositions. Similarly, Tate

and Surlin (1976) find that individuals high in dogmatism or with similar lifestyles to

Bunker were more likely to like and agree with Bunker.

Like Lear, *In Living Color* (1991-1994) creator Keenan Ivory Wayans wrote a

sketch comedy series that satirized racism by hyperbolizing African-Americans

stereotypes (Cooks & Orbs, 1993). Similar to Vidmar and Rokeach (1974), Cooks and

Orbs (1993) studied the relationship between exposure to this series and levels of

prejudice. The authors find support for the selective perception hypothesis, such that

the series reinforced existing racial attitudes. Cooks and Orbs (1993) caution that

"although some liberals may reject some of the extreme images, they seemingly and

unconsciously accept some of the more subtle (yet powerful) negative images of African

Americans" (p. 231). This point will be taken up further in the prejudice and stereotypes

section of this review. In addition, the authors find support for the Selective Exposure

Hypothesis, which holds that individuals are more likely to consume media

complimentary to their demographics, beliefs, and attitudes, as African Americans were

found to be more frequent viewers of *In Living Color* than white Americans.[1] The

authors ultimately conclude that, "*In Living Color* is not an effective tool for pro-social

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[1] Vidmar and Rokeach (1974), on the other hand, find more frequent viewing among
high prejudiced American adolescents than their less prejudiced counterparts.

learning…[and] does more to reinforce existing attitudes than to begin to change" society (p. 231). The present research builds on these studies by attempting to more deeply understand how this type of humor works across series and, using experiments, by measuring its effect on prejudice.

Following in the footsteps of *In Living Color, Chappelle's Show* debuted in 2003 on Comedy Central as a subversive sketch comedy show created by Dave Chappelle. By season 2, the series attracted 3.1 million regular viewers, sold three million DVDs, and earned three Emmy nominations (Glebatis, 2008). After wrapping season three, however, Chappelle suddenly left the show. Because his departure was shrouded in mystery, media outlets charged mental illness. The true story eventually emerged: Chappelle felt concerned about the social impact of his use of hyperbolized stereotypes (Glebatis, 2008). Specifically, Chappelle recounted witnessing a white audience member laughing too hard in response to one of his skits, which led him to wonder if he had taken the stereotype inversion too far (Glebatis, 2008). Glebatis (2008) conducted focus groups centered on *Chappelle's Show*, finding that most participants believed the series to have a neutral or pro-social effect, with only a few, non-white participants expressing concern for potential negative impacts. Neither Chappelle's worries nor the focus group participants' lack of concern were validated by Glebatis' experiment: exposure to the series seemed to have no effect on prejudice levels, positive or negative. Using clips from *Chappelle's Show* and white comedian Ralphie May, Tate (2010) sought to understand the effect of racial satire on levels of racism toward the comedian's racial group (black or white). Experimental results suggest that participants in the satire

conditions perceived elevated prejudice in the comedian's racial group, which seems to imply a counterbalancing effect, whereby participants are critical of the comedian's racism. This dissertation retests this relationship using meta-disparagement humor that targets different groups, from several sources.

Researchers have similarly considered the impact of *The Colbert Report*'s ironic satire, this time focusing on political, as opposed to social, attitudes. While host Stephen Colbert assumes a right wing pundit's persona in order to satirically undermine the Republican agenda, Baumgartner and Morris (2008) find that exposure to *The Colbert Report* increases conservatism among young adults. LaMarre, Landreville, and Beam (2009) find that not all *Colbert Report* viewers assume an anti-Conservative perspective when viewing; rather, participants interpret the humor in a manner consistent with their own political ideology.

Taken together, these studies suggest that the effect of ironic disparagement humor may depend on pre-existing audience attitudes. However, these studies focus on series with clear social agendas. Today, meta-disparagement humor appears in a variety of media outlets. Ironic stereotype exaggeration is a common comedic tool found in such disparate series as *30 Rock, The Colbert Report Community, Da Ali G Show* and its spinoff films, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, *Modern Family, The Office, Scrubs,* and *South Park*, to name just a few. Thus, while the studies detailed thus far suggest the potential for negative effects of meta-disparagement humor, work in this area is limited. This dissertation considers a variety of series that employ this type of humor. To fully

develop hypotheses about the impact of meta-disparagement humor, I now review basic theories of humor.

Three Main Theories of Humor. There are three main theories of humor, all of which offer insight into the potential effects of meta-disparagement. I begin with relief theory. In *Critique of Judgment* (1790)*,* Kant first suggested that humor dissipates stress (Provine, 2000; Zillman, 2000). In 1860, Herbert Spencer similarly posited humor to be a means of stress relief (Martin, 2007). Freud further developed this idea into the relief theory of humor (Martin, 2007; Oppliger & Sherblom, 1992; Shershow, 1986; Uekermannn, Duran, & Channon, 2006). In this framework, humor is viewed as a means of releasing aggression, hostility, and nervous energy (Frijda, 1986; Hobden & Olson, 1994; Lefcourt, 2001; Oppliger & Sherblom, 1992). Humor is perceived and laughter results as tension is relieved. Freud (1960) explains, "The pleasure in jokes has seemed to us to arise from an economy in expenditure upon ideation (upon cathexis) and the pleasure in humour from an economy in expenditure upon feeling" (p. 236). Stein (2000) suggests that satire provides relief from political stress, resulting in "narcissistic delight." Stein also characterizes the satirist as a "beneficent bully." Freud includes aggressive and hostile jokes in list of jokes enabling stress relief. Berger (1987) likewise characterizes humor as a means of hiding aggression. Using experimental data, Hobden and Olsen (1994) suggest that, "under certain conditions, we enjoy seeing others victimized and find jokes portraying such events humorous" (239). Following from this, relief theory is often subsumed by a broader class of arousal theories of humor, which focus on both psychological and physiological arousal (Martin, 2007). Scholars have also

grouped relief theory with mood management, psychoanalytic, and motivational theories of humor (Berger, 1987; Wyer, 1992; Zillman, 2000). Meta-disparagement humor may provide tension relief to those who get the irony and laugh when releasing woes about prejudice. Meta-disparagement humor may also provide relief to those who do not get the irony, feeling reprieve by the comedic expression of their minority resentment.

The second main theory of humor posits that humor results from the resolution of incongruity. Incongruity resolution theory, part of the broader incongruity theories, is perhaps the most widely accepted theory of humor (Berger, 1987; Wyer, 1992). Incongruity resolution theory was introduced in the 1960s and 1970s (Martin, 2007), when Arthur Schopenhauer elaborated on Kantian theories of humor in developing this line of logic (Provine, 2000). According to this theory, incongruity is created when an expectation is violated (Wicker, Barron, & Willis, 1980). Nearly simultaneously, resolution occurs when the audience perceives the joke in a new, humorous context, causing a reassessment of expectations (Wicker, Barron, & Willis, 1980). For example, the classic kids' joke "What is black and white and read all over? A newspaper!" requires a listener, who likely heard "red" in the context of the other colors in the question to reinterpret the question with the word "read" upon hearing the punch line. Central to this two-step process is *bisociation*, whereby an individual perceives incongruity using one schema and then must search for a different schema to re-interpret the situation or joke in a new, humorous light (Martin, 2007). This model of humor applies to comedy that results from surprise or cheated expectations (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Meyer,

2000; Oppliger & Sherblom, 1992; Shultz, 1976; Wyer, 1992) and humor resulting from the "incongruous, surprising, peculiar, unusual, or different from what we normally expect (Martin, 2007; p. 63).

Incongruity resolution theory assumes all humorous stimuli trigger the same brain processes (Berger, 1987; Shultz, 1976), a notion supported by research on individuals with brain lesions (Uekermannn, Duran, & Channon, 2007). Nonetheless, critics challenge the simplicity of this theory's two-step process (Uekermannn, Duran, & Channon, 2007). Using fMRI technology in conjunction with cartoon comprehension, Bartolo, Benuzzi, Nocetti, Baraldi, and Nichelli (2006) find that detection and resolution are simultaneous, thereby rendering a sequential process impossible. The applicability of this theory to all forms of humor is also questioned (Suls, 1983). Most humor scholars accept the centrality of incongruity to humor perception, but the necessity of the resolution step finds less support (Martin, 2007; Nerhardt, 1976; Suls & Gastoff, 1981). For example, some humor, like slapstick, requires only incongruity, but not resolution (Suls, 1983; Uekermannn, Duran, & Channon, 2007).

Using incongruity resolution theory to understand meta-disparagement humor would seem to require another level of processing, whereby the joke must first be interpreted at face value using the two-step process. Completion of this process in turn creates incongruity with political correctness, which sets off another two-step process, this time as the individual interprets the joke as ironic and, thus, not problematic. For example, on *30 Rock*, Tina Fey's character Liz Lemon vents about the unjust administration of flu shots to Dr. Spaceman, who is in charge of the process. When she

exits, Dr. Spaceman asks his male colleague, "Do you think modern science will ever find a cure for woman's mouth?" To interpret the joke explicitly, the audience must first realize Dr. Spaceman is likening Liz Lemon's assertiveness to a medical condition. But this punch line is sexist. So the audience must then reinterpret the joke as ironic, as enabled by the fact that the series is written and produced by outspoken, progressive funny woman Tina Fey. Through this double incongruity-resolution the joke's subversive message to emerges.

Unlike the other, more general theories of humor, the third main theory of humor – superiority theory – pertains specifically to disparagement humor. Plato first suggested the potential for negative effects of disparagement humor, as Provine (2000) summarizes his belief that, "laughter has a malicious element associate with the derisions of our inferiors" (p. 13). Aristotle countered Plato's disregard for laughter as negative and violent, contending that laughter provides benefits (Provine, 2000). Centuries later, Thomas Hobbes wrote on humor's relationship to power in *The Leviathan* (1660) (Provine, 2000). Hobbes was the first to outline superiority theory as we know it today (Zillman, 2000). Superiority theory contends that an audience will find a disparaging remark funny and pleasurable when it causes the audience to feel superior to the target of the joke (Berger, 1987; Buijzen & Valkenburg,, 2004; Critchley, 2002; Meyer, 2000; Oppliger & Sherblom, 1992; Wicker, Barron, & Willis, 1980). Thus, superiority theory focuses on the aggressive dimension of humor (Lefcort, 2001), as "laughter follows the sudden glory we feel from favorable comparison of ourselves with the inadequacies of others" (Wicker, Barron, & Willis, 1980; 702).

Given its close relation to direct disparagement humor, meta-disparagement humor lends itself to explanation by superiority theory. Here, however, we likely see divergence based on individual prejudice level, with low prejudice individuals feeling superior to the implicit bigot, while individuals with higher levels of prejudice likely feeling superior to the explicit minority target. For example, in the movie *Borat*, Sacha Baron Cohen plays a man from Kazhakstan traveling around the U.S. using his ignorance to reveal American prejudice. As Borat, Cohen approaches a group of African American men and declares, "You look like Michael Jackson 'Beat It.'" After asking this group to teach him how to act black, Borat walks into a hotel lobby, pants slung low, and says to the bellhop, "What's up with it vanilla face?" Superiority theory suggests non-racists will feel superior to Borat, while individuals with higher levels of racism will feel superior to African Americans.

As outlined above, all three theories of humor suggest that meta-disparagement humor may perpetuate stereotypes. Relief theory suggests individuals will feel release from meta-disparagement humor for different reasons depending on baseline prejudice. Incongruity resolution theory suggests the cognitive process required to understand meta-disparagement humor takes an extra step, only available to those who seek out the implicit irony. Superiority theory suggests individuals will feel superior to either the explicitly targeted minority or implicitly targeted bigot depending on their predispositions. I move now to a discussion of humor's role in social interaction, focusing on direct disparagement and meta-disparagement humor.

Humor and Socialization. Laughter is inherently social and communicative (Caron, 2002; Darwin, 1872; Frijda, 1986; Lefcourt, 2001; Meyer, 2000; Weisfeld, 1993). Humor can create social cohesion, suggesting humor to be evolutionarily adaptive (Martin, 2007; Storey, 2003). Laughter can also unite by delineating group membership and affirming group attitudes (Chapman, 1983). As this sense of group membership necessarily requires differentiation from others, there exists a "paradox of duality in humor functions between unification and division [that] serves to make humor a 'double-edged sword' by which communicators can unite or divide their audiences" (Meyer, 2000; p. 329). In disparagement humor, there are three parties involved in the dissemination of humor and its effect on social group demarcation: the joke-teller, the audience, and the disparaged group.

The joke-teller tells a joke that puts down an individual or group. The joke teller's group membership and the severity of the disparagement are key to the perception of humor (Ford & Ferguson, 2004). The more likeable the joke-teller, the funnier the audience will find her/his disparaging jokes (Oppliger & Sherblom, 1992). This leads to the next key player in the dissemination of disparagement humor: the audience. As the studies discussed thus far illustrate, audiences high in prejudice towards a particular group find a disparaging joke targeting that group funnier than their less prejudiced counterparts (Ford & Ferguson, 2004; Hobden & Olson, 1994). The third party involved is the "other" targeted by the disparaging joke. The audience is more likely to understand and laugh at a disparaging joke if the audience dislikes the targeted group (Lefcourt, 2001; Wicker, Barron, & Willis, 1980). For example, Weise (1996) found

Republicans to be more attracted to humor that disparages Democrats, and vice-versa. Disparagement humor seeks to lower the position of the target, which in turn elevates both the joke teller and audience (Alexander, 1986). This speaks to the power of comedy to both unify and divide (Meyer, 2000).

In meta-disparagement humor, irony blurs these group lines. Meta-disparagement humor includes the same actors and roles as direct disparagement humor but requires an additional target: the implicit bigot. Often, as in Stephen Colbert of *The Colbert Report* or Archie Bunker of *All in the Family*, the joke-teller serves as the implicit butt of the joke. The audience unites with the joke-teller's true intention, creating an alliance against the implicit bigot. But these roles change when an audience member is not in on a joke: when meta-message is not comprehended. Here, s/he falsely perceives that the comedian is sincerely ridiculing the explicit target group.

In addition to distinguishing between groups, humor is also a mechanism for social control (Storey, 2003; Caron, 2002; Weisfeld, 1993). When an expectation is cheated as the result of deviant behavior, laughter corrects the deviance and re-establishes the status quo (Weisfeld, 1993). For example, if someone wore track pants to prom, peers would likely point and laugh, thereby correcting behavior while also making an example of the convention-breaker to prevent others from committing the same infraction. If this unconventional choice of dress were done with irony, however, others may point and laugh *with* the track pants-wearer for challenging social norms. Here again, irony complicates traditional notions of humor.

Similarly, the unification and division enabled by disparagement humor reasserts social boundaries. Humor can establish and maintain social power (Chapman, 1983). The social power enforced by meta-disparagement is perhaps more fluid than direct disparagement humor given the mixed messages put forth by the jokes. In the context of ironic sexism, Douglas (2010) charges, "It is this 'it's all a joke' veneer that gives enlightened sexism such a protected perch" (p. 166). Thus, while meta-disparagement humor draws attention to social injustice, it does so by repeating stereotypes. The implications for social power, particularly where levels of prejudice are concerned, are therefore unclear. As my research seeks to understand the impact of exposure to content that repeats stereotypes either subtly or explicitly, I move now to an overview of the stereotyping and prejudice literature.

Stereotyping / Prejudice Literature

Stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination first attracted academic attention in the 1920s and 1930s (Fiske, 2000). In his original definition, Lippmann (1922) suggested stereotypes to be false, a definition Dundes (1987) argues is over-simplified. Dundes (1987) instead champions the more nuanced view that stereotypes may be true or false, with each marking ends of a continuum and stereotypes falling anywhere in between. Working several decades after Lippmann, Allport (1954) emphasized the utility of the social categorization enabled by stereotypes, writing, "Ethnic prejudice is an antipathy based on a faulty and inflexible generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group as a whole, or toward an individual because he is a group member" (Allport, 1954; p. 9). Means Coleman (2000) offers a definition that highlights

both these facets, as she asserts a stereotype to be a "conventional, formulaic, oversimplified conception, opinion, or belief… [that] promotes an unvarying pattern of a group that has come to be associated with negative portrayals" (p. 73).

Though instinctive and similar to stereotypes, defining prejudice proves more difficult (Devine, 1995). The tripartite model conceives of prejudice as an affective dimension of stereotypes, a cognitive construct, both of which may result in discrimination, the behavioral manifestation. Similarly, Amodio, and Devine (2006) distinguish between implicit stereotyping and prejudice, as the former relates to semantic memory while the latter relates to affective memory. Talaska, Fiske, and Chaikan's (2008) meta-analysis of 47 studies of racism affirms the importance of distinguishing between prejudice and stereotypes, as results suggest the former to be a better predictor of discrimination than the latter.

Seeking to better understand stereotypes, prejudice, and their effects, scholars have attempted to delineate the psychological mechanisms of stereotyping. Broadly understood to be "cognitive structure[s] consisting of a category label and its corresponding traits" (Berinsky & Mendelberg, 2005; p. 846), stereotypes act as heuristics. From a neurological standpoint, Stephan and Stephan (1993) conceive of stereotypes as a series of nodes, with nodal connection strength depending on activation frequency. In this model, the cognitive nodal network invokes both stereotypes and prejudice. This is similar to Berinsky and Mendelberg's assertion that stereotypes are, "traits… linked together in a coherent structure that resides in long-term memory and can become activated—ready for use—in subsequent judgments" (p.

846). Once activated by an experience, the individual may then follow a top down, heuristic approach and use the stored stereotypes. Alternatively, an individual may use a bottom up, systematic strategy, and attend only to the here and now (Bodenhausen, 1993). Sherman (1996) highlights the abstract nature of the memory structures of long-term stereotypes. Similarly, Greenwald and Banaji (1995) emphasize the unconscious nature of stereotype cognition, as activation derives from past experiences manifested in ways unknown to the individual. To this end, Fazio and colleagues (1994) assert that:

> [T]his sizing up is not limited to higher order cognitive processes that involve selection, interpretation, judgment, and/or integration of attributes possessed or displayed by the object. Instead, attitudes also have the potential to influence more basic processes of perception and attention. They can ready the individual to perceive events that are attitudinally congruent. (p. 214)

Because meta-disparagement humor trades on stereotypes, this research seeks to understand the potential effects of this humorous engagement. If stereotype cognition is indeed unconscious, the ironic intention of meta-disparagement humor may be lost amid the overt use of stereotypes.

Further complicating conceptions of stereotype cognition is the possibility that acceptable stereotypes may be linked to problematic stereotypes. To this end, researchers have found support for spreading activation theory, which holds that "a stimulus may prime constructs that are linked in memory to the one specifically targeted" (Valentino, 1999; p. 299; e.g. Berinsky & Mendelberg, 2005). The authors thus conclude that rejected stereotypes can still be influential as "implicit stereotyping,"

whereby the conscious rejection of a stereotype can trigger other stereotypes. Similarly, Bargh, Chen, and Burrows (1996) conducted an experiment in which participants completed a sentence scramble designed to prime elderly stereotypes. Participants primed with elderly stereotypes walked slower than their control group counterparts, suggesting stereotype activation can influence behavior quite outside of memory.

During the 1988 presidential campaign, the now notorious Willie Horton campaign advertisements ran as part of a mudslinging campaign against Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis. The advertisements feature convicted felon Horton, who committed armed robbery and rape while out on a weekend pass from prison under Dukakis' tenure as governor of Massachusetts. Mendelberg (1997) conducted an experiment to understand the effect of the Horton advertisements on racial resentment. Participants were pretested for baseline prejudice, exposed to news footage regarding the commercials in question (or not, in the control group), and then asked questions to gauge racial policy attitudes. Mendelberg finds that although the ad does not explicitly engage with race, it nonetheless "mobilize[s] whites' racial prejudice"(p. 151). Valentino (1999) similarly observes that exposure to a crime story featuring minority suspects boosted the impact of racial attitudes in candidate assessments. Seeking to understand the psychological process enabling spreading activation theory, Valentino, Hutchings, and White (2002) conducted a study on the subtle race primes strategically used by political campaigns to make salient the connection between political issues and groups. The authors find that cognitive accessibility mediates the relationship between racial

cues and racial attitudes. Taken together, these studies offer support for the spreading activation theory.

Applied to meta-disparagement humor, spreading activation theory suggests that a joke that explicitly targets a minority could activate other stereotypes about this group, thereby undermining the satiric intent. To this end, Amodio and colleagues (2004) find that the neural mechanisms involved with racial stereotypes are activated especially quickly when the race bias is not purposeful and therefore does not trigger critical processing. Thus, even if the audience rejects the stereotype lampooned by a meta-disparagement joke, stereotype activation may still occur. Further, given its ironic nature, the stereotypes of meta-disparagement humor may not be challenged, where the stereotypes of direct disparagement humor may meet with resistance given their straightforward nature.

Stereotype Suppression. In addition to attempting to understand the psychological processes involved in stereotyping and prejudice, scholars have also attended to stereotype suppression. Individuals with lower levels of prejudice are more likely to be able to control stereotype activation compared to individuals with higher levels of prejudice, despite both groups being equally *aware* of stereotypes (Devine, 1989; Lepore & Brown, 1997). Devine (1989) finds that individuals low in prejudice consciously replace the activated stereotypes with counter-stereotypes when cognitive resources are available. When cognitive resources are low, however, less prejudiced individuals respond in the same stereotypic ways to an ambiguous situation as individuals with higher levels of prejudice. Lepore and Brown (1997) find that individuals

with higher levels of prejudice subliminally primed with the category of African Americans demonstrated more negative attitudes towards blacks than those not primed, while individuals with lower levels of prejudice primed with the category of African Americans demonstrated more *positive* attitudes towards blacks than those not primed. Scholars seeking to understand the mechanisms of this divergence have focused on two main areas: internalized values, particularly in relation to compunction, and exposure to out-group members.

Individuals who have internalized the values of equality and fairness are more likely to be able to suppress stereotypes (Amodio, Devine, & Harmon-Jones; 2008). Bargh, Chen, and Burrows (1996) find that awareness of and attention to stereotype activation and desire to suppress are key to actual stereotype suppression. Adding nuance to Bargh et al.'s conclusions, Devine, Plant, Amodio, Harmon-Jones, and Vance (2002) find that internal motivation to act without prejudice moderates explicit racial attitudes, while internal and external motivation to act without prejudice moderates implicit racial attitudes.

Guilt resulting from violated values may alone moderate the relationship between internalized values and stereotype suppression (Devine, 1995; Fiske, 2000). This process relates to the dissociation model of prejudice, which asserts that individuals must navigate between stereotypes and beliefs, and between automatic and controlled sensibilities (Devine, 1995; Fiske, 2000). In a series of experiments focused on homophobia and race, Zuwerink and colleagues (1996) find that low prejudiced individuals experience guilt when they discriminate against a minority group. That is,

people low in prejudice who believe racism to be immoral feel guilty when their actions can be viewed as racist. Similarly, Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink, and Elliot (1991) asked participants how they would or should respond in interactions with blacks or gay people. Participants with low to moderate levels of prejudice expressed general discomfort, guilt, and self-criticism when their admitted and ideal behavior diverged, while participants with higher levels of prejudice expressed no compunction, only general discomfort, when faced with the same difference. Monteith, Devine, and Zuwerink's (1993) work provides consistent evidence, as low prejudiced individuals were more likely to have internalized values of non-prejudice such that they experienced self-directed negative feelings when they deviated from these standards. Higher prejudiced individuals, on the other hand, had internalized the importance of non-prejudice, but, when they deviated from theses standards, they experienced other-, as opposed to

self-, directed guilt.

While the studies discussed thus far consider guilt as an effect of real or imagined discrimination, other research has looked at the effects of compunction on stereotyping. Monitoring brain activity via electro-encephalography, Amodio, Devine, and Harmon-Jones (2007) exposed subjects to faces of different races and then gave participants bogus reports that their brain activity suggested racist thoughts. Participants displaying elevated levels of guilt, as measured by frontal cortical asymmetry, were more likely to agree to participate in a proposed activity aimed at reducing prejudice, leading the authors to conclude that guilt is a negative emotion with proactive potential in the context of stereotype reduction. Similarly, Fazio and Hilden

(2001) gauged emotional reactions to public service videos about racism. Participants who exhibited more concern about the video also displayed increased guilt and agitation, while guilt was in turn associated with higher levels of positive racial attitudes. The effects of compunction relates to aversive racism, a theory that asserts racists and non-racists differ in their willingness to challenge their own unconscious, racist beliefs (Fiske, 2000). When exposed to meta-disparagement, individuals with lower levels of prejudice are more likely to understand the meta-message. Yet, should these individuals with lower levels of prejudice laugh, this laughter is in response to an explicitly politically incorrect joke and may in turn result in guilt. This compunction may suppress stereotype activation. Compunction may therefore moderate the impact of exposure to meta-disparagement humor and stereotype activation. In the present work, however, this is not directly measured. Instead, given that compunction depends on internalized notions of equal rights, I consider baseline prejudice as a predictor.

Like compunction, exposure to out-group members is another potential suppressor of stereotypes. Plant and Devine (2003) find that fears of interacting with people of different races is less likely among those who experience positive interactions with those of other races. Similarly, Towles-Schwen and Fazio (2001) find that undergraduates' positive attitudes towards blacks correlates with prior positive experiences with African Americans, leading the authors to theorize that attitudes are updated with each experience. Gilliam and colleagues (2002) conducted an experiment in which they exposed participants to local news crime stories that either adhered to or deviated from racial stereotypes. Participants from all white neighborhoods exposed to

stereotypical content were more likely to display elevated levels of racism and support more punitive crime sentences than individuals from mixed neighborhoods, who were either unaffected by the stories or expressed lower levels of racism and lower levels of support for punitive actions. Given this, it is possible that exposure to out-group members may likewise moderate the impact of exposure to meta-disparagement humor and stereotype activation. Again, in the present work, however, this is not directly measured. Instead, given this interaction would first decrease baseline prejudice, considering baseline prejudice as a predictor should absorb this factor.

Symbolic Racism. Despite the possibility of stereotype suppression, prejudice continues to manifest in less explicit ways. Perhaps the most studied manifestation of this is Symbolic Racism. Symbolic Racism operationalizes the gap between black and white public opinions, which differ by an average of 20 percent when the issue at hand is nonracial, a disparity that increases to as much as 50 percent where race-targeted issues are concerned (Hutchings & Valentino, 2004). Though the precise causes of this disparity are unknown, value systems and racial resentment have been indicted as possible factors (Kinder & Winter, 2001).

Also called racial resentment or modern racism, Symbolic Racism attempts to explain racism in the post-Civil Rights era (Hutchings & Valentino, 2004). Replacing "old-fashioned racism's" overt racism rooted in white superiority, symbolic racism contends that blacks make unwarranted demands for government support (Devine, 1995; Feldman & Huddy; Hutchings & Valentino, 2004). Thus, racial resentment is said to derive from a combination of anti-black sentiment and conservative values, particularly

limited government and individualism (Kinder, 1996; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Sears & Henry, 2003). Since Sears and Kinder (1971) first defined symbolic racism (Hutchings & Valentino, 2004; Kinder, 1996), further studies (e.g. Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Kinder & Sears, 1981; Kinder & Winter, 2001; Sears & Henry, 2003) offer empirical support that racism consists of anti-black affect and traditional American values central to Symbolic Racism. Kinder and Sanders' (1996) summarize American National Election Survey (ANES) data results, finding, "resentment is a coherent and stable system of beliefs and feelings" (p. 268) that trumps the comparatively insignificant role of self-interest in public opinion about racial issues.

Despite these findings, Symbolic Racism has come under fire. Tetlock (1994) suggests that the ideology of the many of the scholars in the debate has influenced their methodology. In particular, Tetlock and others argue that measures of symbolic racism confound racism and traditional conservative values. This notion is echoed by Feldman and Huddy's (2005) argument that symbolic racism largely reflects ideology, not prejudice. Sniderman and Tetlock (1986) registered a list of problems with Kinder and Sears' (1981) seminal study, focusing on the conceptualization and measurement of symbolic racism, as well as the lack of clear origins. Thus, a key criticism is that proponents of symbolic racism employ confounded measures (Hutchings & Valentino, 2004). Sniderman and Tetlock (1986) ultimately challenge that what Kinder and Sears call symbolic racism is in fact no different than old-fashioned racism. Sniderman and Carmines (1997) similarly charge that the "debate over racial policy is driven primarily by conflict over what government should try to do, and only secondarily over what it

should try to do *for blacks*" (4), thereby highlighting the role of conservatism central to symbolic racism, while ignoring anti-black affect. Researchers have also demonstrated that the applicability of racial resentment depends on race (Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007) and political ideology (Feldman & Huddy, 2005), leading to the conclusion that racial resentment does not equate with racial prejudice in all contexts, thereby undermining symbolic racism.

Sears (1994) addresses the criticisms, citing ten empirical studies that support the notion that, while conservatism and anti-black affect both exist and affect racial policy opinion, racism and conservatism are in fact independent constructs. Similarly, Kinder (1996) asserts the distinction between Symbolic Racism and old-fashioned racism has been amply demonstrated. Combining 30 years of symbolic racism research and criticism, Henry & Sears (2002) propose a new symbolic racism scale related to but distinct from earlier notions of conservatism racism that is high in both discriminant and predictive validity.

Symbolic Racism directly relates to meta-disparagement humor, as both derive from the necessity of re-conceptualizing racism in an age of political correctness. Where symbolic racism contends that public opinion reflects lingering racist attitudes, meta-disparagement humor suggests another outlet for these feelings. Where symbolic racism replaces explicit racism with implicit racism, meta-disparagement humor renders direct explicit disparagement ironic. Having established that meta-disparagement humor maps onto prejudice in the modern world, I move now to an overview of relevant research on stereotyping and humor.

Stereotype Activation via Humor. Work on humor and stereotype activation is limited. In addition to the studies outlined vis-à-vis direct disparagement humor and meta-disparagement humor, researchers have also looked at the relationship between happiness, an emotion closely linked to laughter, and stereotypes.

The emotion of mirth has been shown to boost reliance on stereotypes in making judgments (Bodenhausen, Kramer, & Süsser, 1994). Happiness-induced reliance on stereotypes, however, was eliminated when participants in a laboratory experiment were told they would be accountable for their responses (Bodenhausen, Kramer, & Süsser, 1994). Similarly, Stroessner, Hamilton, and Mackie (1992) primed participants with positive, negative, or neutral moods and found that those in the positive and negative mood conditions were less likely to critically process exposure to stereotyped situations than those in the neutral mood condition. This finding is supported by Bless and Fiedler (1995), who document an association between positive affect and reliance on stereotypes.

Humor research also suggests that comedic content is processed peripherally. Petty and colleagues' (1983) Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) posits the existence of two mental routes for information processing. When an individual is motivated and able to engage in effortful processing, the central route can be accessed, as the individual critically engages with the information. When an individual is unmotivated to engage with the information, on the other hand, the peripheral route is taken. Here, judgments are based not on the substantive information as in the central route, but on positive or negative cues. Following from ELM, humor induces positive mood, which makes it less

likely that the receiver will critically engage or question the message accompanying it (Baumgartner & Morris, 2008; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010; Young, 2008) due to decreased likelihood of elaboration. It is also possible that, because individuals approach humor with a relaxed attitude, they take the peripheral route from the start. Thus, peripheral engagement with the humor material may begin at the outset or once the individual finds the material humorous. Regardless, peripheral, less critical processing ensues. If an individual finds the material offensive, e.g., a person low in sexism who encounters a direct sexist joke, s/he may subsequently engage in critical processing. This speaks to the role of baseline prejudice in ELM processing of humor and, thus, its potential for effects, a discussion that will be continued in more depth in the experimental chapters. This somewhat counters the findings of Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen (2000), who find that emotions, especially anxiety, lead to increased attention to and reliance upon new political information. But, specific to humor, Young (2008) finds that humor in context of political messages diminishes argument scrutiny. Meta-disparagement humor seeks to be funny. In this context, the ensuing mirth may depress critical thinking while increasing reliance on stereotypes. At the same time, however, the audience is less likely to critically process comedic, compared to non-comedic, content (Martin, 2007).

Conclusion

When irony is invoked in conjunction with disparagement humor targeting marginalized groups, meta-disparagement humor results and potential problems arise. Drawing from the humor and stereotyping / prejudice literatures, I have attempted to

theoretically ground meta-disparagement humor in the literature, while also highlighting the importance of studying this phenomenon, particularly where the potential for negative effects on prejudice is concerned. Throughout the dissertation, I focus on meta-disparagement humor that targets blacks, women, gay people, and Arabs given both the popularity of these groups as targets and the varied levels of prejudice towards them. As outlined in more detail above, Chapter 2 offers a discursive textual analysis that develops a theoretical understanding of how meta-disparagement humor works. Chapter 3 quantifies these trends with a quantitative content analysis, while also establishing societal attitudes with a survey. These analyses theoretically ground the subsequent experimental chapters, developing hypotheses the experiments then test. Specifically, I evaluate the impact of exposure to direct disparagement humor and meta-disparagement humor that target women (Chapter 4), gay people and Arabs (Chapter 5), and blacks (Chapter 6) on attitudes towards these groups. As a symptom of post-racialism, post-sexism, and post-political correctness, understanding meta-disparagement offers an inroad into understanding the current social, political, and popular culture landscapes.

Chapter 2 – A Discursive Textual Analysis of the Mechanisms and Meanings of Meta-

Disparagement Humor

Media texts are polysemic. They can have different readings between and within the same audiences. This notion of multi-layered meaning is particularly relevant to meta-disparagement humor. Textual analysis is one way in which these multiple meanings can be mapped (Douglas, 2008). The core research question guiding my textual analysis is: How does meta-disparagement humor work? To answer this question, we need to know who the joke tellers are, who the targets are, how irony is invoked, how the implicit target is summoned, whether different minority groups receive different treatment, and whether the process differs considerably across television series. Conducting a discursive textual analysis allows the understand meta-disparagement humor to be understood in situ; that is, how and when this type of comedy appears.

My textual analysis includes six series known for their edgy, tongue-in-cheek humor: *Chappelle's Show, The Colbert Report*, *The Daily Show, 30 Rock, The Office,* and *South Park.* These six popular television series exist in different universes, varying by genre, how they address the audience, how they invoke irony, and how they treat minorities, creating a multi-dimensional spectrum of the phenomenon of meta-disparagement humor. Thus, while common trends emerge, each series is unique in its use of meta-disparagement. It is therefore futile to layout a linear presentation of the

analysis. Instead, I move between shows by mapping out how they engage with their audiences, a concept closely linked to genre, taking each series in turn to offer an in depth account of each show's unique mechanics of meta-disparagement and engagement with my minority targets of interest: blacks, women, gay people, and Arabs.

I selected a sample of episodes from each series, using both purposeful and random sampling. Overall, I find that the irony of successful meta-disparagement humor most often derives from exaggerated stereotypes, or what I have termed "hyperbole of prejudice." Hyperbole of prejudice ridicules those who employ stereotypes. Comedy can also add a meta layer by putting a twist on a prejudiced idea. This occurs when a logical argument supporting egalitarianism is put forth but, instead of drawing a progressive conclusion, a prejudiced punch line is delivered. The success and problem of meta-disparagement humor therefore hinges on the symbiotic relationship between invoking and lampooning prejudice. That is, to humorously critique stereotypes, the series must first indulge in them. Together, these general trends create a nuanced commentary on the problem of political correctness, whereby a character affirms allegiance to a hollow standard, void of its egalitarian underpinnings.

In this chapter, I detail how each series differently embodies these trends vis-à-vis women, blacks, gay people, and Arabs. To conclude, I weave together a story of meta-disparagement as a construct that transcends series-based specifics and identify patterns that emerge whereby the progressive intention of this type of humor is undermined. Ultimately, I argue meta-disparagement humor is a double-edged sword

that spears prejudice and egalitarianism alike, unable to cut down the former without felling the latter.

<div align="center">***Chappelle's Show***</div>

I begin with *Chappelle's Show*, a sketch comedy series based on the stand-up of star, writer, and producer Dave Chappelle, which joined Comedy Central's lineup on January 22, 2003. Race relations take center stage in the series. I start with *Chappelle's Show* for four key reasons. First, its meta-racist humor most clearly exemplifies the hyperbole of prejudice central to meta-disparagement humor. Second, its treatment of other minorities is more complicated; the irony is more blurred which sharpens the double-edgedness of this type of humor. Third, the show directly addresses the audience, creating a dialogue. That is, by introducing each skit, Chappelle frames the comedic material for an audience both present and remote. Finally, Chappelle was astutely aware of the problematic nature of meta-disparagement humor. As noted earlier, Chappelle left the show before the release of season three. To explore how the series invokes meta-disparagement humor, I analyzed all 25 episodes from the first two seasons. Though Comedy Central eventually aired and released season three without Chappelle's approval, the present analysis focuses on seasons one and two as valid indications of Chappelle's vision.

The meta-racist humor of *Chappelle's Show* relies on hyperbolized stereotypes. The series premiere includes the "Frontline – Clayton Bigsby" skit, in which Chappelle plays a blind KKK member who doesn't know that he, himself, is black. Using a *Frontline* format, PBS' mainstay long-form documentary news series, the interviewer asks Bigsby

why he hates black people. Bigsby responds, "Hey, how much time you got buddy? Where should I start? Well, first of all, they're lazy, good-for-nothing tricksters, crack-smoking swindlers, big butt-having, wide-nosed, breathing all the white man's air. Eat up all the chickens. They think they're the best dancers." This over the top invocation of stereotypes draws attention to the problematic nature inherent to stereotyping. By listing them under the guise of hating the other, the Bigsby character allows the full ignorance of this hatred to come the forefront. Because the character is unknowingly and ultimately putting himself down, this not only becomes a commentary on racism propagated by whites but also about the ubiquity of racism such that its hateful message of inequality can become self-hate. Hate both is and is not color blind.

Similarly, a skit presented as a commercial for a psychic line calls attention to its own use of hyperbolized stereotypes in the name of humor, as the ad begins with a voiceover disclaimer: "Dave Chappelle is not a psychic, he is merely a racist who believes that stereotypes dictate our futures." In the skit, Dave receives a call from a prison, leading him to charge: "You black ain't you?" He then makes the prediction that the caller will get out of jail, only to find himself back in six weeks later, highlighting both the stereotype that black males are criminals and the prejudice inherent to the criminal justice system. Chappelle thus calls attention to the problems of stereotypes through exaggerated reliance on them.

Stereotype exaggeration also serves as a commentary on political correctness. "The Racial Draft" skit employs ironic prejudice of many groups at once. In the racial draft, celebrities are drafted by representatives of various races à la drafts for

professional sports teams. Stereotyping abounds. Arguments over which part of Tiger Woods' ethnicity is hitting the ball precede his draft to the African Americans, leading Chappelle as Woods to say, "So long fried rice, hello fried chicken… I always want to say this, 'fo shizzle.'" The Latinos then pick Elian Gonzalez, saying, "We wanted to do this before the white people try to adopt him as one of their own." The white people then select Colin Powell, whom the black delegation agrees to relinquish if they also take Condoleezza Rice. The Chinese pick the Wu Tang Clang. This choice of an African American hip hop group from Staten Island, New York based solely on their moniker points to the superficial nature of racial categorization. Clan members RZA and GZA join the Chinese with a twist on the *Japanese* greeting, saying "Konichiwa bitches." By invoking often incorrect stereotypes, this reduction of groups to simple one-liners contests the notion of race as an essential category.

Chappelle's Show also explores the reappropriation of black culture by suburban, middle class whites. In a parody of *Trading Spouses,* a white father and black father, both played by Chappelle, switch families. The black father must deal with a white kid who thinks he is gangster, espousing the signature of rapper 50 cent, "G-g-g-g-g-g-g unit." Chappelle as the black dad responds, "G-g-g-g-g-g-g-get your ass in the car." He then takes the kid to see an actual rough neighborhood. The sketch critiques white America's adoption of the superficial trappings of black culture, e.g. slang, with no understanding of the often impoverished conditions experience by African Americans in everyday life. Similarly, in the "Clayton Bigsby" skit mentioned above, Bigsby drives by a car of white guys blasting hip hop and yells to them: "Hey! Why don't you jungle

bunnies turn that music down. Negroes make me sick. Woogy boogy n-----s[2], woogy boogie." One of the pseudo-gangsters in the car gloats, "Did he just call us n-----s? Awesome." Self-congratulatory high fives ensue. Again, Chappelle uses a racial stereotype, and a deeply offensive slur, to undermine not blacks, but whites' reappropriation of black culture based on style and music stereotypes alone. Yet his identity as a blind KKK member who doesn't know he is black further complicates the message. Bigsby thinks he is a black-hating white but is really a white-hating black who thinks he's hating black. The message is as complicated as race relations themselves.

The irony of Chappelle's meta-racist humor is strengthened by his explicit decoding of racist content in the show. In speaking to the audience between skits, Chappelle likens the frog mascot of the now defunct WB network to a minstrel show. The audience groans, leading Chappelle to say, "What? I can't make fun of that fucking frog? Fuck that frog. They wouldn't be doing that on white networks, only black networks." He then sings like the frog, "WB, I like Chicken… Welcome back n-----s, to the WB." Chappelle similarly calls attention to the racism of MTV's reality series *The Real World* with his "Mad Real World" series. Chappelle introduces the sketch, saying, "Every few years, they put a black man on there and try to make him look crazy. Like he'll freak out, you know, but it's like, of course he's gonna freak out, you put him around six of the craziest white people you can find and then expect him to live a normal life. They would not like it if we made a show where we put one white guy around six of the

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[2] While I do spell out other stereotypes with equally revolting histories, I feel the analysis offers context and perspective on these that I cannot provide for the n-word and so choose not to write this word in full.

craziest black people we could find, would they?" The "Mad Real World" reverses this, placing a lone white guy with six over the top black housemates. Chappelle is both direct and ironic in his critique of what amounts to institutional racism, with the former reinforcing the latter.

Chappelle explicitly acknowledges the risk involved with such bold explorations of stereotypes from the beginning. In introducing skits before a live audience, Chappelle says things like, "I'm surprised we're not cancelled yet." With critical backlash, this surprise turned to obvious frustration, as Chappelle began professing his anti-prejudice intention to his audience. Citing the flak for the racial charge of the sketches, Chappelle asserts, "I think I'm being misunderstood. So I just want to take a moment to explain myself. Okay? I'm not advocating in any way, shape, or form any type of racial hatred… The problem is, when you do stereotypical kinds of jokes, there's no room for subtleties."

As should be clear by now, race relations dominate *Chappelle's Show* humor. But the series comically comments on the other minorities of interest to the present research. But the true intention of these jokes about other groups is less clear. In meta-sexist fashion, *Chappelle Show*'s offers moments of female objectification that actually target the men who objectify women. In one skit, a white woman sings Chappelle's thoughts, which include, "Oh, I want to stick my thumb in J-Lo's butt." Chappelle's apparent shock and embarrassment at his own assertion turn the joke back on him, but the horrific objectification remains. Other skits, however, offer no redirection of the objectification, as in the "New York boobs skit," in which Chappelle walks around New York asking to see women's breasts. It is possible to read Chappelle as a jerk and thus

imbue the bit with irony. But Chappelle's demeanor suggests his behavior and requests are unproblematic. This un-ironic objectification, or direct disparagement, is perhaps enabled by the series' progressive stance vis-à-vis race.

More difficult to decipher are sketches in which men ruthlessly degrade women. In "What Men Want," men's reactions to an attractive woman in an elevator are revealed in voiceover: "Man, I could just slide a finger down the crack of that ass," "I wanna have doggie style sex with her," and "look at her nipples, man." The intensity of this objectification obfuscates the irony. That is, are we objectifying the woman, laughing at the men for objectifying the woman, or both? Even a little boy thinks, "I would put a hurtin' on that bitch." This attribution of fantasies of sexual violence to a child further complicates the issue. That is, does it indict male socialization or suggest this behavior is somehow biological? The representation of women in *Chappelle's Show* is thus problematic: the jokes about women are often directly sexist, not meta-sexist.

Gayness is likewise positioned as deviant. In one sketch, a travel stenographer (a little person in a backpack-like apparatus) records everything people say. When one guy denies having said he wanted to make out with actor Matt Damon, the stenographer confirms he did in fact say this, leading his friends to charge, "You are so gay now." The stenographer echoes this notion, saying, "Totally gay, 100 percent." The message is clearly homophobic. Similarly, one of the thoughts sung by the white woman voicing Dave's ideas is: "Gay sex is gross. Sorry, I just find it to be gross." This un-ironic marginalization is followed by a move to lesbianism, which is positioned as a means of hetero-male gratification. Dave revises his dismissal of gay sex mentioned above, having

the white woman singer add, "Unless of course they're lesbians... I like lesbians... I like lesbians." Chappelle establishes a divide between the liminalization of male gay sex and exploitation of female gay sex, with a problematic assessment of each.

Prince's sexuality is also openly lampooned in the *E! True Hollywood Story* parody narrated by Charlie Murphy, brother of Eddie. Murphy recounts, "Prince had on, it was like a Zorro type outfit. He had the ruffles come down the front, curls, mustache...It looked like something that a figure skater would wear, you know what I'm saying?" The skit continues as Prince and the Revolution invite Charlie Murphy and his buddies over to play basketball: shirts versus blouses. Murphy similarly disparages the game: "They was kinda setting these fruity picks... You don't really want to be bent over in front of a cat like that, know what I'm saying." This is direct homophobia. Chappelle similarly traffics in gay prison jokes. In a "Mad Real World" skit, one roommate introduces himself saying, "My name is Tyree and yeah, I went to prison." He then cautions the lone white roommate, "Night, night, keep your butthole tight." Equating gayness with rape clearly defines homosexuality as taboo and criminal, but also introduces meta-racist humor by equating black identity with criminality and power. The true target is difficult to decipher. On the other hand, Chappelle as Clayton Bigsby preaches, "If you don't like *Will & Grace*, that don't mean there's something wrong with you, it means there's something wrong with Will. He's a homosexual." The Bigsby character, explored above, offers an undercurrent of irony strong enough to dispel the explicit message of this joke, but too weak to tone down the homophobia of other skits.

Chappelle's Show's engagement with Arab prejudice is limited to the skit "Arabs on a Plane." Here, two black guys sitting behind two Arabs complain, "Of all the flights, I gotta run with you terrorist sons of bitches. I got my eye on you Al Qaeda." But the explicitly anti-Arab message is undermined by the Arab characters' discussion of *American Idol* and the subsequent stereotypes invoked by passengers vis-à-vis other races. Fear of Arabs is both honored and critiqued in this bit, a trend that emerges in the other series.

The meta-disparagement humor of *Chappelle's Show* epitomizes successful, though nonetheless problematic and complex, meta-racist humor. Through hyperbole of prejudice, Chappelle invokes stereotypes to counter stereotypes. The intention of the series' treatment of women, gay people, and Arabs is more difficult to decipher. That is, the irony of the bits themselves is more obscured but is implied by the series overarching progressive racial politics.

The Colbert Report

As Chappelle literally becomes the racist to undermine racism, Stephen Colbert deadpans as a right wing pundit modeled after Fox News pundit Bill O'Reilly. The *Colbert Report* debuted on Comedy Central on October 17, 2005. As in *Chappelle's Show*, *The Colbert Report* is performed in front of an audience; Colbert directly addresses live studio members and home viewers alike. As the analysis will detail, the series employs hyperbole of prejudice and, more than the other series considered, putting a twist on a prejudiced idea. This twist occurs when a logical argument supporting egalitarianism is put forth but, instead of drawing a progressive conclusion, the logical progression is

inverted and a prejudiced punch line is delivered. I include 55 clips in my textual analysis, selected through tag searches related to my groups of interest using the series' online database.

Though he rarely breaks character, the irony of Colbert's message is explicitly conveyed via other mechanisms. In "The Word" segment, the show draws attention to the host's overdone prejudices with onscreen text that counters Colbert as he speaks, acting as a visual voice of reason. Again, this offers a direct address to the audience, inviting the audience in on the joke. The audience responds with laughter, cueing the at home viewer to follow suit. For example, on a rant about all the groups whom we should racially profile, Colbert says, "We'll have to go after Hispanics, too." The word makes the true target – racists – clear, as the following text appears onscreen: "Need a job, Lou Dobbs?" By invoking outspoken anti-immigration advocate and former TV host Dobbs, the word makes the bigot implied by Colbert's ironic satire explicit (episode from 1/5/2010).

The series also creates irony by putting forth what at first seems to be a logical argument for egalitarianism, but, instead of drawing a progressive conclusion, a prejudiced punch line is delivered. When discussing the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, Colbert reasons, "Now folks, I say this Ledbetter legislation is unfair. Women are the ones who get discriminated against the most, which means they're going to benefit from this law more than men. That is sexist." Here we see an argument favoring fair pay mounted, only to be undercut by drawing the conclusion that men would lose as a result. He punctuates his words with raised eyebrows and pointing at the screen, these

gestures helping to emphasize the unreasonableness of this stance (episode from 2/2/2009). Similarly, after showing clips of Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh likening Obama's health care and economic plans, respectively, to reparations, Colbert reasons, "Those guys aren't racist. They're just saying a program that helps the poor is actually a secret plot by African Americans to steal white people's money. A racist would say it's a secret plot to steal white people's women." Again, we see Colbert argue that Beck and Limbaugh are not racist by laying out how they are, in fact, racist. This is an inversion of logic that effectively flips to the punch line. (episode from 7/29/2009).

Colbert's meta-racist humor often pierces the belief that we now live in a post-racial society. Colbert speaks directly to this idea: "At this point, folks, racism is nothing more than an unpleasant nuisance that it's best to ignore," claiming it takes more courage *not* to talk about race (episode from 7/29/2009). In another segment, Colbert likewise imparts: "What better way to prove you're not a racist than by highlighting another opponent's race. See, black people are handy. They allow us to criticize the president without being accused of racism. The same way Jews can tell Jewish jokes and the Irish can tell Irish jokes." With these words, Colbert draws attention to the folly of dismissing racism when it still exists by pointing out all the ways our politics weaken the goals of the Civil Rights movement (episode from 9/24/2009).

Similarly, Colbert often makes fun of reverse discrimination, perhaps the ultimate byproduct of post-racialism, saying things like, "As a white male, I am being reverse discriminated against. Thank you, reverse Civil Rights leader Pat Buchanan" or "Now that white people are disadvantaged, that makes us the new black people"

(episode from 7/20/2009). In these examples, Colbert's character shows utter ignorance of the black struggle for equality and in doing so mocks whites who champion this view in earnest. Thus, his explicit message remains racist. But, Colbert also makes his overtly racist appeal so over the top, it drips with anti-racism and disdain for white people who express and believe such ideas.

Where Colbert's meta-racist humor clearly targets racists by having his character embody the racist, his meta-sexist humor is more ambiguous. For example, Colbert reports that he has been accused of sexual harassment, noting, "I have been advised by council not to go into any details of the case, which is a shame because they are pretty arousing." While ironic, this bit minimizes sexual harassment as a serious issue by making it salacious, thus having it both ways: anti-sexist and sexualized (episode from 10/10/2006). Similarly, in another episode, Colbert says, "You go girl… This is America, where everyone has the right to life, liberty, and letting their milkshake bring all the boys to the yard" (episode from 4/16/2010). This assertion highlights women's right to their sexuality, but does so with a cheap metaphor likening the female body to a milkshake à la the 2003 Kelis song of the same name. This emphasis on female sexuality is echoed in an installment of "The Word," in which Colbert says, "Sorry, ugly step-sisters, you're dying alone." The word then chimes in with: "After writing *Eat, Pray, Love*." While The Word typically expresses egalitarian statements in opposition to Colbert's prejudices, thereby inverting his meaning, here it reinforces our cultural emphasis on beauty by mocking the author of a book targeted to neo-spiritual women. In the same segment – about Betty and Archie's engagement in the Archie comics – The

Word also serves its usual voice of reason function. Colbert asks, "Without Archie to focus on, what would Betty do? Probably something sad like rediscover her own dreams and devote her life to making the world a better place." The Word then displays a picture of Hilary Clinton. The inconsistent shift between levels of meaning makes decoding the series' true intention vis-à-vis women difficult to decipher. That is, are we to laugh at women, sexism, or both? (episode from 8/18/2009).

Where the other series analyzed both critique and pander to homophobia, *The Colbert Report* is more successful in its meta-homophobic humor. Though he still panders to homophobia, homophobia (not gay people) is the more obvious target. For example, Colbert says, "I have always said that babies are a miracle. Unless they belong to homosexuals, in which case they're pets" (episode from 6/15/2010). Likewise in response to the over-turning of proposition 8, Colbert says the judge "even signed it gay: it is sooooo ordered," adopting an exaggerated effeminate speech pattern (episode from 8/5/2010). These meta-homophobic jokes mock gay stereotypes to ironic effect while also reinforcing stereotypes about gay men.

The Colbert Report's jokes about lesbianism likewise critique homophobia, targeting males who embrace lesbianism solely for their own sexual gratification. Colbert draws attention to this hypocrisy by mock applauding Drew Barrymore and Ellen Page's fake lesbianism, referencing *Marie Claire* photographs of the actresses sharing a kiss. Colbert explains: "Now if they had chosen to be actually gay, this would make me furious. But they did not have a choice. They're just two young women expressing a god-given, natural desire to promote their new movie *Whip It.* Hey, ten percent of the nation

is born with an innate preference for self-promotion." Colbert pretends to be anti-gay and sympathize with faux lesbianism by using an argument that in fact supports acceptance of homosexuality. This delivers a message of support for gay rights and criticism of using lesbianism for publicity. Colbert then remarks, "This is the best commercial-grade lesbianism since Aunt Jemimah stuck her tongue right into Mrs. Butterworth's flapjack," followed by a nervous laugh and the coda: "I'm not sure if that last sentence is legal." Colbert's original message is at once driven home and recanted by this sensationalized statement (episode from 9/22/2009).

The Colbert Report similarly counters Arab prejudice using meta-disparagement humor. In one segment, Colbert explains, "Folks, everyone knows that terrorists are all young, poor, disenfranchised Arab Muslims. Well, except the Christmas bomber, who was a middle class, well-educated Nigerian." With this simple statement, Colbert critiques the post-9/11 witch-hunt that conflates Arab and Muslim identities, equating the monolithic combination with terrorists (episode from 1/5/2010). Colbert not only rejects this fear of the other, but reinforces it. This fear is emphasized when Colbert feels personally threatened. In response to the Danish cartoons, Colbert says he will not show them "out of respect… for [his] life" (episode from 2/7/2006). Thus, *The Colbert Report* both criticizes and empathizes with prejudice against Arabs.

As a series with a live studio audience and explicit awareness of the home audience, realized via direct address in multiple forms, the *Colbert Report* can move between levels of meaning and irony. Where Chappelle spoke to his audience about his concerns of seeming racist when setting up the clips, Colbert exaggerates his explicit

message to ridiculous levels. Colbert embodies hyperbole of prejudice. This enables him to twist logical arguments for progressivism to an unreasonable, prejudiced conclusion. Colbert's mannerisms also underscore his explicitly bigoted persona. Eyebrows raised to exaggerated heights, aggressive pointing at the screen, and long pauses with the hint of a smile punctuate his explicit message with irony. The series' disparagement humor therefore takes many targets, within the same segment and, often, the same joke. The irony enabled by the awareness of the audience helps establishes the meta-intent, though without loosing the complication created by the other levels.

The Daily Show with Jon Stewart

Like *Chappelle's Show* and *The Colbert Report*, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* is constructed to facilitate a direct exchange with the live and home audiences. Of the six series included in the analysis, Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* premiered first, on July 22, 1996 with host Craig Kilborn. Current host Jon Stewart took over the anchor desk in January 1999. Each installment of this fake news series includes a headlines segment anchored by Stewart, followed by correspondent pieces and an interview with individuals ranging from academics to celebrities. Like the other series, *The Daily Show* employs hyperbole of prejudice, both challenging and perpetuating stereotypes. To infuse disparagement with irony, Stewart shifts between sarcasm when alone on stage and statements of incredulity in response to correspondents' deadpanned jokes. Using the series' online archive, my textual analysis includes clips tagged with keywords related to my groups of interest. I also included relevant pieces by Larry Wilmore and Samantha Bee, the veteran black and female correspondents, respectively, as well as

the entire episodes from the first week of March 2003, when *The Daily Show* rose to cultural prominence with the invasion of Iraq, for a total of 106 clips.

The Daily Show explicitly highlights the inanity of using stereotypes. Attempting to make a joke about Turks, Stewart breaks down the process of creating stereotype-based meta-disparagement. First, he says he must familiarize viewers with Turkish stereotypes: funny hats, thick coffee, stoners. He continues, "When I make jokes that play upon said traits, you can nod knowingly." Stewart adds, "It's going to take time to reduce them to one broad generalization. But if you stay with it, trust me, 'hey, coffee fezzy hat guy' will get the same explosive laughter as, 'O'Malley , why don't you see if you can borrow a shickel from shimelock Jewyman to buy your beer.'" In this moment, Stewart draws attention to his reliance on stereotypes for humor, asserting this only works when the audience is familiar with otherwise arbitrary, two dimensional characteristics (episode from 3/3/2003).

The Daily Show's inclusion of Larry Wilmore as the "Senior Black Correspondent" is a more subtle form of "meta-disparagement" humor. This title is explicitly racist but implicitly mocks tokenism. Wilmore allows *The Daily Show* to explore race in more depth. As noted in Chapter 1, in his piece "N word," Wilmore asks an African-American councilman trying to ban use of the N word, "What if I said, 'n----- please'? Now that's just being polite." While Wilmore is using a common phrase ("n----- please"), he does so in a way that highlights how uncomfortable this word makes everyone involved, both playing to and placating the power dynamics this word effects (episode from 3/28/2007). In discussing Robert Downey Jr.'s Academy Award nomination for his black face role in

Tropic Thunder, and citing the often joked about trend in Hollywood to reward actors for playing disabled characters, Wilmore asks: "What are we, the new retarded?" While explicitly likening blacks to the mentally challenged and using a derogatory term for the mentally challenged, Wilmore calls attention to the racism of both Downey Jr.'s role and the Academy Awards' honoring it (episode from 1/27/2009).

Wyatt Cenac, a newer addition to *The Daily Show* who, despite also being African American, carries the non-race based title "Senior Political Analyst," similarly allows the series to broach the issue of race. One bit starts with a clip of news anchor Chris Matthews commenting on Obama: "He is post-racial by all appearances. You know I forgot he was black tonight for an hour." Cenac makes fun of his pretense of racial blindness with an eloquent synopsis. He catches himself in the mirror and says, "I forgot I was black." He switches modes to deliver a rendition of "Pants on the Ground," the *American Idol* internet sensation featuring a black *Idol* hopeful singing about wearing pants slung low, a style associated with African American men. In this clip, Cenac is able to literally and ironically embody the hypocrisy of post-racialism (episode from 1/28/2010). *The Daily Show*'s engagement with race is thus carefully constructed with explicit cues to indicate irony, including utilizing in-group members.

The back and forth between Stewart and his correspondents likewise emphasizes the ironic intention of the series meta-sexist humor. In discussing Sarah Palin's move to require women to pay for their own rape kits, correspondent Kristen Schaal opines, "Tough love. And besides, they were raped, not robbed." Stewart plays the straight man in this bit and responds with mock indignation at the explicit

offensiveness. Schaal's position as a woman coupled with Stewart's reaction allow the meta message to come to the fore. That is, by suggesting rape is a lesser crime than robbery, Schaal offers mock endorsement for Palin's bill. Stewart's reaction highlights the ridiculousness of this notion, allowing humor to couch the series' outrage at the inhumanity of such a bill (episode from 10/1/2010).

Yet, the series meta-sexist humor tends toward the enigmatic. As meta-disparagement humor writ large hyperbolizes stereotypes in order to undermine prejudice, meta-sexist humor in *The Daily Show* exaggerates objectification of the female body to challenge this very practice. In the segment "Miss American Spy," an edited video introduces ousted CIA agent Valeria Plame in film noir style, setting her up as a femme fatale. Stewart then introduces a clip from CNN that refers to Plame as "compelling." The video zooms in on the doctored CNN ticker, which reads "By the way, compelling = f---able." By calling her "fuckable", the series at once objectifies Plame and ridicules CNN's objectification of Plame (episode from March 19, 2007).

Homophobic humor in *The Daily Show* both critiques and panders to homophobia, often simultaneously. Stewart reports on backlash against allowing children of same sex couples to participate in the annual White House Easter Egg hunt saying, "For 130 years, children in frilly dresses have bent over to push pastel-colored eggs with dainty spoons across an impeccably manicured lawn. It would be a shame to see that tradition begayed." In making fun of the homophobic backlash, Stewart nonetheless invokes gay stereotypes (episode from 4/18/2006). *The Daily Show* also makes offensive gay prison jokes. For example, Stewart asks Larry Wilmore, "What do

you call black people who have gay sex?" Wilmore answers, "Cellmates." This joke not only ironically perpetuates the stereotype of black males as prisoners, it problematically links homosexuality with prison rape. Yet, implicitly, this serves as a commentary on the criminal justice system and prison power dynamics (episode from 12/11/2010). Thus, the meta-homophobic humor in *The Daily Show* creates a contested relationship with homosexuality that renders gayness acceptable, problematic, and taboo.

Given the terror obsession of post-9/11 American society, meta-anti-Arab humor in *The Daily Show* most often deals with this form of racism in the context of racial profiling. For example, Wilmore deadpans, "Racism today is in sorry shape and we need it more than ever, especially since 9/11." His call to arms is inflected by his minority status, which could be read validating the legitimacy of his assertion or adding irony by allying him with the "other." Wilmore then expresses frustration regarding public officials' racism, e.g., using the term tar baby or saying that blacks are bad swimmers. He suggests we shift racist attention to Arabs in order to fulfill Dr. King's dream. Here, Jon Stewart as the straight man interjects, causing Wilmore to clarify that the Dr. King he means is his podiatrist, "racist mother fucker." This punch line not only undermines Wilmore's endorsement of podiatrist King's sentiment, but renders it antithetical to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of a universal equality regardless of the color of one's skin. Yet, at an explicit level, Wilmore legitimizes the shift in racism from African Americans to Arab Americans (episode from 8/22/2006). This piece comically critique prejudiced witch-hunts. This sentiment is echoed by Stewart's reaction to the US' refusal to allow musician Yusuf Islam, formerly Cat Stevens, entry to the US, as he says: the "real success

story in war on terror? You know we finally got the guy that wrote 'Peace Train.'" By invoking the song "Peace Train," Stewart fully realizes the irony dripping from his statements. The meta-message of these jokes thus criticizes anti-Arab racism, but the explicit message resonates with a deep fear of Arabs rooted in post-9/11 politics.

The Daily Show therefore uses its format to ironic effect. Aware of the audience, Stewart allies himself with the liberal viewer when reacting to correspondents' explicitly prejudiced statements, allowing the irony of their deadpan to fully unfold. Like Colbert, he plays to the audience with facial expressions, hand gestures, and pauses that bring both his comedic and ironic intentions to the forefront. Yet, like the other series, the meta-message builds on a direct message based in stereotypes, allowing the potential for real, not imagined viewers, to attach to any level of meaning. That is, to challenge stereotypes, *The Daily Show* indulges them.

30 Rock

Where the series explored thus far have a direct conversation with live and at home audiences, *30 Rock* positions viewers as looking in on the behind-the-scenes exploits of the cast and crew of show-within-a-show, *The Girlie Show* (*TGS*), a sketch show similar to *Saturday Night Live*. Now in its seventh and final season, this no-laugh-track situation comedy debuted on NBC on October 11, 2006. Tina Fey, the first female head writer for *SNL*, created the series with *SNL* creator Lorne Michaels. Fey continues to write the show and also plays Liz Lemon, the head writer of *TGS*. My analysis includes every third episode from seasons one through four, as well as those with relevant summaries, for a total of 31 episodes.

The irony of *30 Rock*'s meta-disparagement humor is more implicit than that of the other shows, relying on the audience to infer irony. Further, given the multiple perspectives of the characters, many viewpoints are put forth. This possibility is in part what inspired Fey to create the series: "These… characters would have completely different views about any topic that came up – race, gender, politics, workplace ethics, money, sex, women's basketball – and they would agree and disagree in endless combination" (Fey, 2012; pp. 170-171). As a sitcom, viewers come to know the characters in a different way than they do hosts like Chappelle, Colbert, and Stewart. The audience is encouraged to identify with at least some of the characters. Thus, the multiple viewpoints built into *30 Rock* offer different messages and points of identification for the same joke. This allows the audience to choose character allegiance, while further separating the levels of meta-disparagement humor. As the analysis will detail, this set-up makes the irony of *30 Rock*'s meta-disparagement more implicit than the other series.

30 Rock's meta-disparagement jokes are often simple exaggerations of stereotypes. But where the other series include, in different ways, shock at such prejudice, *30 Rock* leaves interpretation open by utilizing its vast cast of characters. For example, court-ordered community service finds *TGS* star Tracy Jordan (comedian and former *SNL* cast member Tracy Morgan) coaching a baseball team from the disadvantaged neighborhood of Knuckle Park – described as so tough, babies drink orange soda instead of breast milk (episode 207). When General Electric CEO, the owner of *TGS* parent company and, thus, indirect boss of the show, Jack (Alec Baldwin) asks the

kids on the team about their dreams, the answers include servicing vending machines, suing the city after being shot by a cop, becoming a talkative doorman with a drinking problem, and cleaning offices. While Jack asked the question, the kids answer the questions, with no reaction from the other characters. Rather, the message that these stereotypes are problematic in nature requires the audience to infer irony from the juxtaposition of such dismal dreams with the aspirations of kids. That conservative white male Jack drives the scene by asking the question also helps develop the bit into a commentary on the occupational prospects of minority kids from disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Similarly, in the pilot (episode 101), Liz tries to woo Tracy to join the cast of her show over lunch. Over chicken and waffles, Tracy laments another stereotype, as he complains, "Do you know how pissed off I was when *US Weekly* said I was on crack? That's racist. I'm not on crack, I'm straight up mentally ill." The juxtaposition of the unchallenged chicken and waffle stereotype with the challenged crack stereotype creates an interesting tension with the variable acceptability of stereotypes at the fulcrum. This is further complicated by Tracy's in-group status as an African American, which helps undercut the explicit racism of the crack joke (and orange soda joke above). The series is also playing the characters against each other with no resolution, leaving the audience to decide with whom to ally.

In addition to exposing the problems of prejudice via hyperbolized stereotyping, meta-disparagement humor on *30 Rock* also engages with the problems of political correctness, a concept less emphasized by Colbert and Stewart. As in the other series,

this critique highlights the inorganic nature of political correctness solely for the sake of appearing politically correct. When *TGS* star Jenna (Jane Krakowski) asks Liz if she is going out with "that cute black guy," Liz responds, "Why am I the only person who doesn't care that he's black?" Liz then steps into an elevator with an African American UPS man. After offering him a "And good morning to you, sir," she turns to Jenna with a gloating "huh," basking in her self-asserted color blindness (episode 116). This scene comments on the misguided confusion between true political correctness and smugly pretending not to notice differences, which, as this scene displays, actually requires one to notice difference.

While the discussion of how meta-disparagement humor works in *30 Rock* hints at the relationship the series has to blacks, women, gay people, and Arabs, I move now to a more detailed account of how each group fares as a meta-target of the show's humor. *30 Rock*'s engagement with race attempts to ridicule racism, as evidenced by the joke above. Mocking white culture's reappropriation of black vernacular similarly plays with stereotypes. Tracy declares sales of his video game to be "through the riznoof." When Jenna asks, "Well, how far through the riznoof?", one of Tracy's friend interjects: "Whoa, that's not slang, he has a speech impediment." Tracy adds, "And this check is the priznoof," leading his friend to admit: "Now that one was just him being obnoxious" (episode 301). Negating and then affirming a stereotype creates tension. The target shifts between the explicit (blacks) and the implicit (racism), settling on neither. Again, we also have multiple characters contributing different pieces to the joke with no one in a favored position. Similarly, following Tracy's wife's (Sherri Shepherd)

repeated use of the phrase "hair did," Liz says, "Maybe we can undid these handcuffs," making fun of ebonics. Tracy calls Liz racist. His wife calls Liz a "cracker" (episode 407). Liz's racist reappropriation of black culture is initially undermined, but Tracy's wife's hateful backlash throws off the balance. The word cracker is a particularly interesting choice given its invocation of a rural Southern "redneck," which Liz is not. Further, and perhaps off the radar of most viewers, is that the word cracker refers to whip cracking by slave owners, thus it could also serve as a commentary on white power. So with whom does the audience identify? Likable Liz who accidentally perpetuates a stereotype or the angry victim of this stereotyping? While we are invited to laugh at the white characters' misuse of black slang, the core of the joke nonetheless targets both black slang and anger. Thus, it speaks to the ongoing unease of intercultural interaction, but shifts discourse between characters with no resolution.

This progressive intention is similarly undermined by some of the series black characters, written to counter stereotypes by embodying characteristics opposite to them. The identity and racial allegiance of Harvard educated *TGS* writer, Toofer (Keith Powell), is often questioned. When Tracy finds out he is a descendent of Thomas Jefferson, Toofer congratulates him. Tracy responds, "Of course you would say that, you wish you were white" (episode 119). When Toofer tells Liz, "My cousin set me up on a blind date for Valentine's and I just found out the girl is, well, urban," Liz asks if this means she's black, leading Toofer to dodge: "I don't know how to get out of this" (episode 413). Toofer is thus presented as neither black nor white and, more problematically, uncomfortable with his identity. The humor derives from the oddity of

stereotype reversal which, in turn, perpetuates stereotypes. This oddity is brought to the surface by other characters, again shifting around both responsibility for the joke as well as its ultimate message.

In another episode, Liz dates African American Steven Black (Wayne Brady). Like Toofer, Steven is written to counter stereotypes to comedic effect. During their date, Liz decides she does not like this *Star Wars* blogging, Civil Wars re-enactor who enjoys taking pictures of doors. When she tries to cut the date short, however, Steven charges racism, leading Liz to reply: "I am not racist. I love black men. I love you. This is fantastic. Let's get dessert. Death by Chocolate. No, no, not that kind of chocolate." When recounting the experience to Jenna, Liz avers that Steven "played the race card" and so decides she can only break it off after five more dates. When Liz finally ends things, she explains, "I truly don't like you as a person. Can't one human being not like another human being? Can't we all just not get along?" (episode 116). Political correctness as a hollow ideal comes to the fore, but so does the hypersensitivity of minorities. The audience can sympathize with Liz, Steven, or both.

While most of the jokes go explicitly unchallenged in *30 Rock*, as in these examples, character reactions nonetheless enable the intended irony of the more extreme meta-disparagement jokes to emerge. For example, when Liz's idol, female comedy writer Rosemary (Carrie Fisher), offers a skit suggestion centered on a "beautiful mulatto," Liz awkwardly interjects: "Uh, uh, uh, I don't think we're allowed to use any of those words." Rosemary then proposes a skit in which Tracy calls a white actor in blackface "n-----." The writers laugh, but Liz counters: "You can't do race stuff

on TV, it's too sensitive" (episode 204). Liz's reaction calls attention to the problematic nature of Rosemary's racism, but with a self-reflexive wink to the audience, as this forbidden "race stuff" is now in fact on TV. With this self-reflexivity, Liz is moving in and out of character, further confusing the issue of true joke target. The audience can now ally themselves with Rosemary and the writers, Liz, or Tina Fey. The polysemy embedded in this arc allow the audience to attach to prejudiced, politically correct, and/or progressive meanings.

Like the series' meta-racist jokes, *30 Rock*'s meta-sexist jokes invoke simple stereotypes and complicate them with irony. Meta-sexist humor on *30 Rock* successfully pokes fun at the physical appearance expectations imposed on women, but the jabs at sexual harassment and feminism are more ambiguous. For example, Liz Lemon is constantly belittled for her eating habits, fashion sense, and position as a single woman with a powerful job. Jack catches Liz with a cookie and asks if she needs that in the middle of the day. Liz informs Jack she just gave blood, to which Jack responds, "Does that burn calories?" (episode 107). Offensive indeed, but Jack's position as an unlikable megalomaniac invite the audience to laugh at Jack the sexist, not with his sexism. Similarly, Jack tells Liz, "Lemon, women your age are more likely to get mauled at the zoo than get married" (episode 201). Jack also refers to Liz's biological clock as "Big Ben sized." But the intention of this is a bit confusing, as he adds, "Thank god I don't have your biological need for children, that would make success impossible" (episode 304). This is sympathetic to the plight of women who want both a family and career while also suggesting that a maternal drive is both ubiquitous and primary.

Where Jack enables the irony of the sexist jokes thus far, the jabs at Liz come from multiple sources. After giving blood, Liz tells the technician she is going home to break up with her boyfriend. Looking over her chart, the woman responds: "Hmm, 35, single and no children. Three sexual partners in the last ten years. I don't know, doll, maybe it's time to settle" (episode 107). Given that the technician is female, it is difficult to discern the true intention of this joke. That is, do we feel bad for Liz for being single or for being attacked for being single? Either way, Liz's relationship status invites pity. Similarly, when Liz tells Pete she was eating donuts in bed, Pete asks, "What are you depressed about or celebrating?" (episode 313). Again, are we laughing at or sympathizing with Liz? The multiple characters and levels within each character offer many possibilities of interpretation.

That the show itself often mocks Liz further complicates the message. *30 Rock*'s plots frequently develop from Liz's desperation to find a man, as when she finds out her ex-boyfriend is engaged and so tries to poison him (episode 319). Similarly, the show mocks Liz through her own words. In one episode, Liz shares, "Sometimes, to feel like I have company during dinner, I dispute credit charges on speaker," and later asks, "Is this potpourri or chips cause I'm about to eat it" (episode 304). In all of these examples, Liz appears pathetic for failing to embody hegemonic notions of femininity. But irony diffuses the joke target between Liz for countering societal expectations and the societal expectations Liz counters. Further, the audience can understand both levels and thereby connect to Fey the writer's struggle with this tension.

Also complicating the issue: Liz is not the only target. When Jenna gains weight while starring in *Mystic Pizza* the musical, which required her to eat four slices of pizza a show, Jack responds "She needs to lose thirty pounds, or gain sixty. Anything in between has no place in television." While this serves a commentary on ridiculous media body standards, Jenna embodies this stereotype when she flips out over picture her niece drew in which, "I look so fat." Here, we are laughing at the personalization of these body standards which, in turn, activates audience policing of bodies.

30 Rock also explicitly makes fun of sexual harassment, with irony complicating the message. Jack tries to guess *TGS* star Danny's (Cheyenne Jackson) new romantic pursuit, saying, "Is it that chick lawyer who does the sexual harassment presentation? Because she's asking for it" (episode 410). Superimposing such phrases as "chick" and "asking for it" on the topic of sexual harassment at once indicts Jack's insensitivity *and* the concept of sexual harassment, giving viewers the option to identify with the objectified female lawyer, Jack, or both. Thus, it remains unclear whether the joke ridicules sexual harassment the act or sexual harassment the concept. Similarly, Jack's new girlfriend is named one of "*Maxim*'s 'I'd Rape That 100'" (episode 413). Here, hot lists typical of magazines like *Maxim* and their readers are ridiculed, via hyperbole, for their vile objectification of women. That is, by intensifying the level of objectification to rape, this joke at once criticizes and normalizes male carnal desire. In her autobiography, Fey (2011) takes her satiric criticism of *Maxim* the next level. Speaking about airbrushing magazine photos, Fey writes, "Photoshop itself is not evil. Just like Italian salad dressing is not inherently evil, until you rub it all over a desperate young actress and stick her on

the cover of *Maxim*, pretending to pull her panties down. (That "thumbs in the panties"

move is the worst. Really? It's not enough that they got greased up and in their panties

for you, *Maxim*?)" (p. 171). Where *30 Rock* leaves interpretation of its *Maxim* joke open

for the audience by diffusing the joke across characters, Fey's autobiography takes a

harder line against *Maxim* and institutionalized sexism.

Feminism fares less well on *30 Rock*. Liz's feminism is presented as ridiculous, as

when she rants about Valentine's Day to *TGS* writer Pete's son, proposing an alternative:

Ann Howard Shaw Day, named for the American suffragette (episode 413). This joke

suggests that feminism is obsessed with the symbolic and superficial, sans irony. That is,

we are encouraged to laugh at Liz for being too extreme, not at the anti-feminists who

would laugh at Liz. Similarly, when Liz first meets Jack in the pilot episode, he responds

to her declaration that she doesn't cook by pigeonholing her: "New York, third wave

feminist, college-educated. Single and pretending to be happy about it. Over-scheduled,

under-sexed, you buy any magazine that says, 'healthy body image on the cover,' and

every two years you take up knitting for a week." Liz glibly asks if Jack will now guess her

weight, to which he responds, "You don't want me to do that." Again, feminism is

problematically presented as part of a package deal: middle aged, "unfeminine," and

miserable – while stereotypes about single career women are also lampooned. The

audience can therefore move between sympathizing with the different characters and

their perspectives.

30 Rock's meta-homophobic humor both panders to and critiques homophobia.

Liz worries that a potential beau may be a born again Christian, leading Liz to fantasize,

"We could spend our Saturdays in Central Park trying to save gay rollerbladers" (episode 119), thus invoking a gay stereotype and mocking homophobic Christians at the same time. After learning that girls go wild at gay Halloween parties, two *TGS* writers know they must attend. But while one says, "we spend Halloween with gay guys," the other ends the sentence with, "hot girls." The look on each face suggests the guy who said "gay guys" erred (episode 403). As such, gay guys are positioned as a means for heterosexual males to meet women. Simply calling something gay can also be used as a punch line, as when Liz mocks Tracy's lion tattoo with the simple: "Wow, that is one gay lion" (episode 319), when Jack's girlfriend (Julianne Moore), says, "You look like a gay mortician in that suit" (episode 422), or when Tracy tells happy go lucky page Kenneth (Jack McBrayer), "Kenneth, you hair color is disrespectful towards lesbians" (episode 409). These jokes are delivered without situation-specific irony, trading on the series' widely understood progressiveness to use anti-gay slurs without consequence.

Alternative sexuality is also handled as a joke, as demonstrated by Liz Lemon's stint as a relationship expert on show within a show *Deal Breakers*. To one woman, she says, "Nope. Your fiancé's gay. Look at him. Look at you. Classic case of fruit blindness." Then to another couple, Liz intones, "Yeah there's no such thing as bisexual. That's just something they invented in the 90s to sell hair product" (episode 322). Though Liz's talk show persona and use of one-liner stereotypes is over the top, the message is ultimately dismissive of non-traditional sexualities. In these examples, no character offers a counter-position to these stereotypes. Thus, the "gay as deviant" message is primary.

Like its treatment of gay people, *30 Rock*'s engagement with Arabs is complicated and ambiguous. Limited to one episode (206) of the current sample, the meta-disparagement humor attempts to undermine prejudice but does so from a position of fear. This episode plays with the tension between racial profiling and precaution. Liz is suspicious of her new neighbor, Raheem (Fred Armisen), when she accidentally receives a package addressed to him. The package contains a video of Raheem and another man climbing across monkey bars. Returning it to Raheem, Liz notices that maps cover his walls. When Liz tells this to Pete, he notes the map on her wall, leading a defensive Liz to retort, "That's different, that's an antique. And I'm a white lady." Liz therefore justifies her suspicion, inviting the audience to understand her fear by using humor and prejudiced reasoning. Pete then shares that Raheem rewired his toaster and showed him a back way to the airport. Liz concludes: "I don't want to sound racist, but that pita pocket might be a terrorist. Did that sound racist?" By using the hyper-stereotyped moniker "pita pocket" and apologizing for her prejudice, the audience is invited to laugh at and sympathize with Liz. The irony of this joke is thus diffused within one character.

Later in the episode, Raheem celebrates the completion of a secret project, predicting, "Soon, everyone will know the name Raheem." With Jack's urging, Liz decides to call homeland security. The next morning, Pete rushes into Liz's office saying, "Some dudes took Raheem last night." Liz responds, "Sounds like an American hero saw something and said something." Soon after, it is revealed that Raheem's special project, and, thus, an explanation for the suspicious behaviors, was a video audition for an

adventure reality program, *The Amazing Race*. Once Raheem returns, he recounts being tortured while in custody. Liz asserts the government doesn't torture, leading Raheem to declare "I want to do something spectacular with" his experience – his eyes alight with the fervor of an extremist on a mission. This ending reframes the episode to present several viewpoints. First, it is critical of American foreign policy in the post-9/11 era. Yet, it commiserates with citizens influenced by this xenophobic paranoia. Finally, it is sympathetic yet suspicious of the Arab Americans targeted by it. These nuanced messages map onto to the different perspectives offered by the characters – Liz, Pete, Jack, Raheem – who each tell a part of this complex joke.

Where the other series obliterate the fourth wall, directly addressing and conversing with audiences both live and at home, *30 Rock* is a more traditional scripted situation comedy that rarely breaks the fourth wall save for moments of self-reflexivity. This gives the audience the impression of looking in on the inner-workings of this behind the scenes series, which renders meta-cues more implicit. The narrative structure builds meta-disparagement jokes that tend to unravel between characters, weaving a tapestry of irony and encoded meaning that the audience can latch onto at any point. Without a laugh track or punctuated character reactions of shock, the audience is not guided to ally with any one character or viewpoint. Thus, meaning floats between characters allowing the audience to pin the true meaning on or between the character(s) that matches her/his own. This pushes the irony of the meta-disparagement humor further underground than the other shows considered.

The Office

An adaptation of the British series of the same name, the American version of *The Office* premiered on NBC on March 24, 2005. Now in its eighth season, this comedy show sans laugh track depicts the day-to-day operations at Dunder Miflin, a fictional paper company. *The Office* takes on a documentary style complete with direct addresses to the camera and, thus, an imagined audience. Thus, its relationship to the audience occupies a place between that of the fake news and sketch series on the one hand and *30 Rock* on the other. Where *30 Rock* utilizes its cast of characters to diffuse joke meaning across personalities to ambiguous effect, the mocumentary style of *The Office* is more directive in making prejudice its ultimate target. Specifically, using cuts to other character reactions, the series makes awkward, immature, and inappropriate *Office* boss Michael (Steve Carell) the butt of most of its jokes. Yet Michael's ignorance is presented as well-meaning, which complicates the show's stance toward stereotypical thinking.

The Office makes the strongest statement regarding political correctness, using Michael to position it as a sometimes hollow ideal; Michael couches his prejudice in worries about political correctness not because he believes it but because he thinks he has to. This imperative often derives from other characters' shock at Michael's offensive statements. Thus, the irony underlying the hyperbole of prejudice is more explicit. I analyzed 34 episodes of the series, choosing all episodes with descriptions relevant to my groups of interest, as well as every fourth installment from the first six seasons.

In *The Office*, as in the other series, the irony of successful meta-disparagement humor most often derives from hyperbole of prejudice as perpetrated by Michael. The problematic nature of these jokes is realized with a one two punch of awkward silence and stunned reactions from the other characters, as enabled by a documentary aesthetic. Michael's interactions with African American co-worker Stanley (Leslie David Baker) exemplify this trend. When putting together a basketball team, Michael announces which co-workers will play. He points to Stanley with an, "Of course." Stanley asks, "Why 'of course'?" Michael then asks what position he plays, causing Stanley to again ask, "Why 'of course'?" Trapped, Michael says, "Uh." Stanley presses further: "What's that supposed to mean?" This refusal to advance the narrative is punctuated with awkward silences that draw out the tension. Michael finally ends the conversation saying, "I don't know. I— I don't remember saying that" (episode 105). Here, the stereotype of blacks as basketball players is disproven, as the joke is ultimately on Michael when Stanly does not fit this mold. Michael's ignorance is again displayed when he introduces Stanley as "the key to our urban line." Stanley counters, saying, "Urban? I grew up in a small town. What about me seems urban to you?" (episode 405). Again, the joke is on Michael, whose assumption that black means urban is negated by counter-stereotypic diegetic reality. The exaggerated ignorance of Michael's character and the challenging reactions of the other characters make the meta target clear.

Michael's offensive, stereotype-centric jokes speak to the complicated notion of political correctness surrounding prejudice. That is, meta-disparagement humor as practiced by *The Office* targets not only bigots, most often embodied by Michael, but

also the clumsiness of forced political correctness. *The Office* more than the other series analyzed lampoons politically correct culture, exemplified by Michael. For instance, the employees find out that black co-worker Martin has a criminal record. Michael asserts that he trusts Martin completely, as failure to do so would be ignorant. He then takes it one step further, challenging, "In fact, you show me a white man that you trust and I'll show you a black man that I trust even more. Pam, tell me a white person you trust." Pam, the young office secretary played by Jenna Fischer, offers her dad, which Michael counters with Danny Glover. Jim, the young salesman interested in Pam played by John Krasinski, suggests Jonas Salk. That Michael does not know Salk discovered the polio vaccine establishes his general stupidity, inviting the audience to laugh at him. Jim switches his choice to Justin Timberlake, which Michael meets with Colin Powell. In response to Jesus, Michael cites Apollo Creed, the black boxer in the *Rocky* films (episode 309). Michael's examples are nonsensical, chosen based not on virtue or true accomplishment but on name recognition alone. The only unifier of his examples is race, which reduces black identity to a one-dimensional characteristic that alone separates individuals, even if under the guise of asserting superior trustworthiness. Michael's twisted attempt at political correctness actually undercuts the equality and fairness inherent to the true intention of this ideal.

Similarly, in a storyline involving co-worker Oscar's (Oscar Nuñez) sexual orientation, Michael attempts to make Oscar feel comfortable, intoning, "Did you know that gay used to mean happy? When I was growing up, it meant lame. And now, it means a man who makes love to other men. We're all homos, homo sapiens. Gay

people aren't necessarily who you think they are. I mean anybody can be gay: businessmen, like antique dealers or hairdressers or accountants. Oscar, why don't you take this opportunity to officially come out, however you want to do it, to everybody here. Go head. Stand up. I'm doing this for you." Not only does Michael rely on stereotypically gay professions in an attempt to undercut homophobia, but his push to appear accepting in fact singles out Oscar in a prejudiced fashion. Oscar's response punctuates Michael's ignorance: "Yes I'm gay. And I didn't plan on sharing this part of life with you" (episode 301). The interplay between the characters positions Michael's ignorance as the joke target, in turn highlighting the ignorance behind political correctness invoked under the hollow pretext of faux egalitarianism.

The artificiality of political correctness is similarly spotlighted when multiple groups are meta-disparaged, as this draws attention to the ignorance of using race, gender, religion, etc. as essential categories, much like *Chappelle's Show* "Racial Draft" skit. In the season one episode, "Diversity Day," Michael institutes his own version of diversity training, which includes giving each coworker an index card with a "race" to hold on his or her forehead. That the "races" include Jamaican, Black, Italian, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jewish, Asian, and Brazil highlights Michael's stupidity and, in turn, the ridiculousness of forcing labels under the guise of diversity. The office workers are then supposed to treat each other in accordance with the "race" on the cards. When the Jewish and black cardholders meet, Michael declares, "Olympics of suffering right here: slavery versus the holocaust." These harrowing moments in history reduce Jewish identity to the holocaust and black identity to slavery, but it is this very essentializing

that is ultimately the joke. This bit can therefore have it both ways, trading on stereotypes for a quick laugh while striking an undertone of the danger of stereotyping. Michael's ignorant exploration of multiple identities speaks to the complicated state of political correctness. Not only are stereotypes exaggerated in this example, but the true difference between groups is lost in a misguided attempt to negate difference, which may perpetuate prejudice.

The meta-racist examples detailed thus far illustrate how meta-disparagement humor in general works in *The Office*: through exaggerated stereotypes. Usually told as misguided jokes by Michael, the audience is invited to laugh at Michael's ignorance, not the explicit minority target of his jokes. This offers a larger commentary on the hollowness of political correctness, especially when practiced by someone who is actually an ignorant, cloddish bigot. It is through this strategy that political correctness is exposed as potentially forced and hypocritical. Although the series more clearly directs the joke to target Michael, his prejudiced notions are still put forth. In other words, those with higher levels of racism may identify with Michael.

I now move to a discussion of meta-sexist humor, which follows the same general trends. Sexist stereotype exaggeration in *The Office* most often derives from objectifying women's bodies in order to critique this very objectification. This ironic twist often pivots on Michael. For example, in episode 213, Michael and Jim look over menus at Hooters. After daring Jim to order milk, Michael tells the waitress, "I will take the chicken breast, hold the chicken." The waitress' refusal to validate his offensive selection with any kind of response redirects the joke at Michael, and the sexist gimmick

that is Hooters. But who is the audience really laughing at, Michael, women, or both? A similar example in another episode takes a stronger anti-sexism stance when, a woman about to nurse her infant, visits Dunder Miflen. Michael hides under the desk to talk for the baby, saying, "I want some milk. And you know where milk comes from: breasts." This joke trades on the sanctity of motherhood to clearly label a Michael the buffoon who reduces women to their body parts. Likewise, later in the Hooters episode, Michael asks Jim what he likes about Pam, listing such features as her "legs" and "boobs." Jim responds that he likes that she's easy to talk to, redirecting the target to Michael's objectification. Nonetheless, the reduction of women to their body parts still occurred.

In episode 321, Phyllis – a middle aged, heavyset co-worker played by Phyllis Smith – is flashed in the office parking lot. Michael questions the exposer's choice of target, wondering, "I mean did he even see Pam? Or Erin from behind?" Kevin – the middle aged, often ignorantly inappropriate co-worker played by Brian Baumgartner – concurs, "I'm guessing not." This not only undermines the gravity of this crime of power but also suggests a correlation between a woman's attractiveness and the likelihood that she will be the target of sexual assault. This further suggests that assault derives from sexual desire rather than the true determinants of power and violence. Pam counters Michael's laughter, saying, "It's disgusting and demeaning," thereby at once challenging this humor in the storyline and allowing it as part of the series as a whole.

It is often Pam's refusal to tolerate Michael's sexism that reframes the joke target from women to Michael and sexism in general. Thus, a female character has the power to diffuse or affirm gender stereotypes. For example, in the Pilot episode, when

Michael introduces Pam, saying, "If you think she's cute now, you shoulda seen her a couple years ago," Pam responds with an angry, "What?" Michael awkwardly changes the subject: "Uh, any messages?" The true target of these jokes is Michael's inappropriate objectification of the female body, as realized by Pam in these examples. But, to criticize objectification, these jokes require actual objectification occurs.

Meta-sexist humor likewise critiques political correctness as a shallow ideal, as when Michael announces, "Magazines, TV shows and movies portray women as skinny, tall goddesses. Well, look around. Are women like that? No. No, they are not. Even the hot ones (he motions to Pam) aren't really that skinny. So what does that say? That says that you women are up against it and it is criminal. Society doesn't care. Society sucks. I don't even consider myself a part of society, FYI, because I am so angry over all this" (episode 213). Echoing Michael's take on gay identity detailed above, this bit positions Michael's offensive objectification to be misguided but well intentioned, as he goes so far as to absent himself from society over gender roles, which the audience knows is an empty pledge. Michael then declares a "Women's Appreciation Day," during which he laments, "Let's face it, most guys are from the dark ages, they're cavemen. And they like a woman to be showing cleavage and to be wearing eight-inch heels and to be wearing um see-through underpants. But, to me, a woman looks best when she is just absolutely naked." Michael objectifies women under the guise of progressiveness, but his immaturity and essentializing of men become the true joke targets. Thus we have misguided political correctness that is ultimately sexist, suggesting that men like Michael shouldn't even try to be politically correct. Where Michael typically serves as the clear

joke target, moments that highlight his good intentions complicate the issue. The audience is invited to sympathize with Michael, even pity his ignorance. Thus, the blow dealt to prejudice is softened, diffused through the layers of Michael's character.

Meta-sexist humor on *The Office* similarly draws attention to the fallacy of post-feminism, or the belief that gender equality has been achieved. This is epitomized by the series' engagement with sexual harassment. For example, in response to straight-laced co-worker Angela's (Angela Kinsey) unease with Kevin's sexually suggestive comments, Michael suggests Angela make similar comments to Kevin, an idea Kevin likes (episode 221). Michael's response therefore attempts to evoke egalitarianism vis-à-vis gender by, extending sexual harassment in the office to men. In another episode, Pam worries about how her co-workers will act when her mom (whom Kevin refers to as "mmmmMILF") visits Dunder Miflin. Pam worries, "Usually the day that we talk about sexual harassment is the day that everyone harasses me" (episode 202). Again, this bit spotlights the problem of political correctness as a concept forced on people as a set of activities and behaviors devoid of its true progressive underpinnings. Is the audience invited to sympathize with Pam the harassed, the male co-workers forced to abide by externally imposed morals, or the misunderstanding caused by these opposing positions? Michael's response to Toby's request for five minutes to do a sexual harassment presentation echoes this idea: "What are we supposed to do? Scrutinize every single little thing we say and do all day?... What are you going to do tell us to do? Not tell jokes or send emails? There is no such thing as an appropriate joke. That's why it's a joke" (episode 202). Depending on the viewer's position, she or he may sympathize

with or laugh at Michael, or, combining both, pity him. By explicitly making fun of sexual harassment and promoting the demeaning of women in the workplace, the irony of these sequences highlights the struggles females face in the still patriarchal workplace. But, as in *30 Rock*, the characters' positions are equally relatable depending on audience predispositions, allowing the audience to attach to the point of view that best matches her or his own.

The series' meta-homophobic humor has a more tenuous relationship with its explicit target of gayness. As with the other shows discussed thus far, *The Office* both critiques and panders to homophobia. As in his racist and sexist jokes, Michael often makes homophobic comments that he then attempts to cover up based on his co-workers' responses. For example, after telling a fellow basketball player not to be too gay on the court, Michael responds to Jim's shock by saying, "And by gay I mean, um, not in a homosexual way at all. I mean the, uh, you know, the bad at sports way. I think that goes without saying" (episode 105). Though it has developed into a general putdown detached from its origins, "gay" used in common vernacular draws on homophobic stereotypes to mean un-masculine in a hegemonic sense. In this scene, it is again unclear if we are supposed to laugh at Michael's ignorance, immaturity, and homophobia, or sympathize with his confusion regarding popular slang. *The Office* therefore creates enough ambiguity to have it both ways, naturalizing prejudice with an edge of progressive shock. Similarly, in episode 301, Michael says, "That is the fun of this place. I call everybody faggy. Why would anybody find that offensive?" When Michael becomes aware that this may be offensive to homosexual Oscar, he says, "You don't call

retarded people retards, it's bad taste. You call your friends retards when they're acting retarded. And I consider Oscar a friend." As a peace offering, Michael says, "Maybe we could go out for a beer sometime and you could tell me how you do that to another dude." While Michael's suggestion is offensive, his earnestness renders his offense ignorant, perhaps to the point of inviting sympathy. Given Michael's intention not to be a bigot, and that he's not mean or vindictive, the show represents prejudice as the result of stupidity – as opposed to mysogny or fear– and so excuses it a way. This allows the audience to like Michael, or at least sympathize with his confusion, for different reasons depending on their own views.

The Office also panders to homophobia in a more blatant fashion. This is most apparent in the witch-hunt surrounding Oscar's outing. Dwight announces, "I think all the other office gays should identify themselves, or I will do it for them" (episode 301). Here, we are invited to laugh at Dwight's homophobia. But later, Phyllis tells Michael that, due to his matching shirts and socks, "We all thought you were gay in high school." Michael kisses Oscar to prove he will not enjoy it. Oscar is therefore used to create a gag joke, confusing the anti-homophobia message delivered earlier in the episode.

While Michael is the main vehicle of meta-racism and meta-sexism, several characters tell homophobic jokes surrounding Oscar, making the series' overall relationship to homophobia more ambiguous and akin to the dispersed joke meaning seen in 30 Rock, allowing the audience to attach to the character that matches their views. Kevin asserts Oscar would love prison (episode 605), Angela asks Oscar to be on the all-woman party planning committee (episode 313), and young co-worker Kelly

(Mindy Kaling) asks, "So how much do you love Lance Bass now?" (episode 313). When

Oscar says he is not familiar with Bass (former member of the boy band 'N Sync who

happens to be gay), Kelly retorts, "Oscar, you really need to learn more about your

culture." Angela also reveals, "Sure, sometimes I watch *Will & Grace*, and I want to

throw up" (episode 301). While Michael's ignorance allows for the ironic twist central to

meta-disparagement, the utterances of different characters obscures the irony and

reinforces gay stereotypes. Thus, it is unclear whether these jokes are meta-

homophobic or just homophobic.

The series treatment of lesbianism is likewise double-edged. For example, after

Oscar's outing, Michael and Dwight try to determine who else may be gay. They

consider Phyllis because, "She makes absolutely no attempt to be feminine" and Angela

because she is, "hard and severe" (episode 301). This stereotypical view of lesbians is

undermined by the invocation of the implicit joke targets, Michael and Dwight. Yet the

series also appeals to and implicitly ridicules males who enjoy the prospect of lesbianism

for heterosexual gratification, as when Michael asks, "What if Pam was a lesbian? What

if she brought her partner into work? Would that be crossing the line?... What if they

made out in front of everyone?" Michael then suggests they act out the scenario with

Pam and an inflatable doll (episode 202). As in the other series, faux lesbianism is at

once exploited and posited to be the fantasy of ignorant males.

The two scenes in the present sample that engage with Arabs mirror the other

series' treatment of gay people. The irony offers only a blurred version of an implicit

target, forcing the audience to teeter between possible joke targets. Seeing a man with

a turban entering the building, Michael orders the lights off and calls security. Learning his true identity, Michael says, "The IT tech guy and me did not get off to a great start" (episode 401). Michael problematically conflates an imagined Arab identity (the man is actually Sikh) with terrorism. But is the audience aligned with the wrongly accused and stereotyped other, the post-9/11 fear precipitating this judgment, or both? In this vein, on the "Diversity Day" episode, Michael explains his decision not to include Arabs, reasoning, "I just thought that would be too explosive, no pun intended. But I just thought, too soon for Arabs." This othering of Arabs based on fear confuses the joke target.

The mocumentary style of *The Office* carefully constructs meta-disparagement humor, from offensive joke delivery through the fallout, as enabled by editing and scripted responses of shock. The true target of prejudice is more clear-cut than in *30 Rock*, as Michael is positioned as the buffoon of most jokes. Nonetheless, possible joke meaning is spread between characters and within Michael. That is, Michael's foolish reliance on stereotypes, or his hyperbole of prejudice, invites pity and derision but not anger. This creates a softer implicit joke target: prejudice driven not by hate but ignorance. Through Michael, *The Office* therefore positions political correctness as a sometimes empty concept motivated by social pressure not a commitment to egalitarianism.

South Park

Of all the series analyzed, the world of *South Park* exists most separate from its audience. And, as will be discussed, *South Park* is unique in its use of meta-

disparagement humor. Currently in its 15th season, *South Park* debuted on August 13, 1997 on Comedy Central. The series centers around four crude forever third-graders in the fictional town of South Park, Colorado. Skewering everything from celebrity to religion, the series inspires the wrath of many. *South* Park is deliberately and avowedly politically incorrect, creating a commentary of society that veers on the reactionary. I examine all episodes that sparked controversy, as determined via web and news searches, as well as episodes with titles or descriptions that mention any of my groups of interest, yielding a sample of 19 episodes.

Where the other series hyperbolize stereotypes to ridicule prejudice, *South Park* challenges the ridicule of stereotypes, creating a sort of ironic irony. The satire of the series is realized by its crude, cut-out animation style that accentuates distance from reality, as well as its "all-permeating bad taste and offensiveness" (Thompson, 2009; 218). The series ultimately serves as a more direct commentary on political correctness, exemplified by the episode "Ginger Kids." Cartman – the main kid, modeled after *All in the Family*'s Archie Bunker – creates a culture of discrimination against redheads at school. His friends dye Cartman's hair red while he sleeps. Cartman then unites the ginger kids in a movement to kill all non-redheads. At the conclusion of the episode, Cartman and the ginger kids prepare for genocide when Cartman's friends confess they dyed his hair red. Cartman comes to a realization: "Oh my god, you guys, I just realized something. We shouldn't be doing this, I mean look at us. What have we become?... Don't you see? If we go and exterminate everyone who isn't ginger, then we're no better than they were for thinking less of us. Maybe we all have to learn to live

together." The overdramatic music and delivery that accompany this speech counter the utopian, idealistic intention of his plea. Similarly, in Episode 1302 when Cartman responds to Kyle calling him a fag by declaring, "You shouldn't use the word 'fag,' it's insensitive to butt pirates." Again we see the repudiation of political correctness by being politically *in*correct. Thus the vacuous-ness of political correctness is exposed in favor of intentionally offensive exchange.

In another episode, Token, the aptly named lone black character, calls Cartman a fat ass. In retaliation, Cartman throws a rock at Token and is subsequently charged with a hate crime. Angry that this constitutes a hate crime, Token delivers a presentation to the mayor entitled, "Hate Crime Laws: A Savage Hypocrisy." In concluding his presentation, Token avers, "Mayor, all hate crime laws do is support the idea that blacks are different from whites, that homosexuals need to be treated differently from non-homos, that we aren't the same." We again see humor drawing attention to the failure of political correctness to live up to its egalitarian intentions, but presented in an ironic fashion. Yet the underlying message is an argument for the dismissal of the existence of racism and, thus, legal protection of minorities – a reactionary political stance.

The series' treatment of gay people is likewise self-reflexive. In the episode "Death Camp of Tolerance," Mr. Garrison, a gay teacher fired for being gay but rehired when his dismissal is deemed unconstitutional, attempts to be fired again by doing inappropriate sexual things in school with his boyfriend, Slave. The kids tell their parents, who in turn send the kids to a camp for intolerant kids. This challenges the progressive message of tolerance by implying that tolerance can be misguided while homophobia is

actually justified. *South Park* also links gayness with pedophilia, marking it as distinctly deviant. For example, a gay scout leader is fired for his sexual orientation, only to be replaced by a hyper-masculine pedophile. In the end, Kyle's dad notes, "We've all learned an important lesson. Just because somebody's gay doesn't mean he's gonna molest children. Straight people do that, too." The take home message is not that stereotypes are dangerous, but that the world is dangerous. Worry about being politically incorrect is rendered pointless.

    *South Park'*s ironic irony, or irony that does not invoke an implicit progressive target, extends to its treatment of Arabs, as embodied in the series' ongoing censorship battles over depictions of Mohammad. This self-reflexive saga adds another layer to the ironic commentary on post-9/11 xenophobia evidenced by the other series. On July 4, 2001, the episode "Super Best Friends" first aired. The titular super best friends refer to a united legion of religious leaders including Buddha, Krishna, Lao-Tzu, Joseph Smith, Seaman, Jesus, and Muhammad. Despite depictions of Muhammad being forbidden in Islam, no publicized backlash occurred and the image of Muhammad and the other super best friends remained in the series' opening credits for several years. In 2006, *South Park* revisited depictions of Muhammad in the wake of the Danish cartoon controversy with a pair of episodes ("Cartoon Wars I" and "Cartoon Wars II"). In these installments, diegetic controversy erupts when it is learned that *Family Guy* will depict Muhammad in an upcoming episode. At the last minute, Fox censors the image with "Image censored by FOX" in all caps over the character. When the kids fail to understand why the censorship is necessary, they are sent to Muslim sensitivity training,

itself a joke about politically correct culture. The camp leader instructs the kids to, "Put your self in the shoes of a Muslim. It's Friday night, but you can't have sex and you can't jack off. There's sand in your eyes, and probably in the crack of your ass, and then some cartoon comes along from a country where people are getting laid and mocks your prophet." As in the above examples vis-à-vis other groups we see an exaggerated example of misguided political correctness actually serving the opposite function of the ideal's intention.

At the Muslim sensitivity training, the kids fight over whether or not the *Family Guy* episode should air. Becoming self-reflexive, "Cartoon Wars I" ends with "Will free speech prevail… or will Comedy Central puss out?" In "Cartoon Wars II," the kids present their arguments regarding the broadcast of the image of Muhammad to Fox executives. Ultimately, Fox airs the episode, in which Muhammad rings a doorbell and hands *Family Guy*'s Peter a helmet. Just as Muhammad is about to be revealed on *Family Guy* and, thus, *South Park*, he is covered by, "Comedy Central has refused to broadcast an image of Mohammed on their network." Back in the narrative, President Bush reacts: "Hey that wasn't bad at all. They just showed Muhammad standing there, looking normal." But then fictional terrorists retaliate. In these episodes, religious sensitivity, censorship, and Islamic extremism are all targeted, but none are presented as valid points of view.

April 2010's "Episode 200" and "Episode 201" witness the return of all of the series' most memorable characters, including Muhammad. The result is more self-reflexive play with depicting Muhammad. The characters plot to dress Muhammad up in a bear costume and put him inside of a moving truck. In real life, news of this sight gag

leaked in advance of the episode airing. New York-based RevolutionMuslim.com warned *South Park* creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker that insulting depictions like this may lead to their deaths à la Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh, killed by a self-professed jihadist for his documentary about violence against women in some Muslim cultures. To avoid further controversy, Comedy Central responded by heavily censoring the episode. The episodes are not available on *South Park*'s website.

South Park contains the most heterogeneous techniques of the series reviewed here. Its agenda seems to be a lack of agenda. Irony appears to be invoked to both produce and mitigate controversy, not, as in the other shows, to deliver a progressive message (or at least pretend to do so). The series uses its universe of characters to embody and condemn different perspectives, making none appealing or relatable. Further, the series does not address the audience. Thus, the audience is kept at a distance, invited to laugh at everything from a detached point of view. *South Park* puts forth a reactionary political agenda in which political correctness is rendered pointless.

Conclusion

Though the six series included rely on different formats and modes of addressing the audience, including one sketch comedy, two fake news series, two no laugh-track situation comedies, and a cartoon, this analysis attempts to put them in conversation with each other to develop a deeper understanding of how meta-disparagement humor

works. By considering their differential invocation of irony as dictated in part by audience address and, relatedly, genre, the nuances of this type of humor emerged.

The irony of successful meta-disparagement humor most often derives from exaggerated stereotypes, or the hyperbole of prejudice. This draws attention to the problematic nature of stereotypes by ridiculing the very stereotypes invoked. Meta-disparagement humor also explores the pitfalls of forced political correctness. Specifically, meta-disparagement humor positions blind adherence to political correctness for the sake of being politically correct – not because of any commitment to egalitarian values underlying it – as problematic. Thus, meta-disparagement humor walks a tightrope between denouncing prejudice and criticizing political correctness, creating a commentary about that very tightrope.

The success of this type of humor, that is whether or not the ironic cues are strong enough to overpower the prejudiced content, varies by target. Meta-racist humor invokes and exaggerates black stereotypes in order to call attention to the absurdity of reducing a diverse group to a few characteristics and deeming race an essential characteristic. At the same time, this humor also comments on the problems of the myth of post-racialism, suggesting racism remains rampant, as evidenced by white reappropriation of black culture, especially black music and slang. *South Park*'s Chef's comments encapsulate this point: "Black people always used to say, 'I'm in the house' instead of 'I'm here.' But then white people started to say 'in the house,' so we switched it to 'in the hizouse.' Hizhouse became hizizhouse. And when white folks started to say that, we had to change it to heezay, then to hizzle, which we had to change to

hizzavizizzle. And now because white people say hizzavizizzle, we have to say hippityhoppity flu." This jokes leverages stereotypic black language to ridicule the ability of mainstream culture to poach the "privileges" of marginalized identities wherein language can be an instrument of power and self-identification for marginalized groups. Meta-racist humor highlights this problem but does so by perpetuating it. The meta-racist humor of these six series is successful, though nonetheless complicated, in that racism is the clear target. The irony of humor vis-à-vis the other groups is even less clear.

Meta-sexist humor explores women's rights by commenting on their ongoing objectification, sex and power, feminism, and femininity. As meta-disparagement humor in general walks the tightrope between prejudice and political correctness, meta-sexist humor navigates between sexism and anti-sexism. By objectifying women and making light of sexual harassment and feminism, meta-sexist humor problematizes objectification and sexual harassment by explicitly supporting these practices. But to lampoon objectification, the series must first indulge in it. Together the series suggest that some men are by nature unable to suppress an almost primal impulse to objectify women and any efforts to do so will prove ultimately futile. The jokes about women generally seek to promote anti-sexism, with undertones of sexism.

The treatment of sexual orientation in these series ranges from progressive to offensive, often within the same joke. As with meta-sexist and meta-racist humor, the series take on homophobia with exaggerated stereotypes. Yet, they also pander to homophobia, making homosexuality deviant. Lesbianism is positioned as a vehicle of heterosexual male pleasure, a notion that is at once propagated and undercut, but the

acceptability of lesbianism itself remains unexplored. When these series veer toward direct homophobia, it seems the ironic and progressive position of the series in general allow this gay bashing to occur.

Meta-anti-Arab humor takes root in post-9/11 fear. In these series, this type of humor most often deals with racism in the context of racial profiling. In addition to challenging the witch-hunt in the wake of 9/11, the series' meta-anti-Arab humor likewise makes fun of the more progressive attempt to placate this fear. But fear remains at the core of these jokes. Thus, meta-anti-Arab humor both critiques and legitimizes fear of Arabs.

Across series, the construction of meta-disparagement humor is complex, diffused across ways of addressing the audience, through certain characters, and within the same character. Yet, after spending an entire segment carefully walking this tightrope of political correctness vis-à-vis a given group, sequences often end with an out of the blue punch line targeting a different group. This complicates inferring the intention of this type of humor, as the last minute joke goes unchallenged. In the *Chappelle's Show*'s "Reparations" skit, Chappelle plays a white newscaster who reports the disbursement of reparations checks to African Americans. Chappelle recounts market gains for gold, diamonds, and buckets of chicken, while watermelon remained "surprisingly flat." He then announces the launch of 8,000 record labels in the last hour, 3 million Escalades sold by Cadillac in one afternoon, and the growth of Fubu into the world's largest corporation after its merger with KFC. This is the hyperbole of stereotypes to end all hyperboles of stereotypes. But the skit ends with breaking news

that the crime rate dropped to 0. The reporter opines, "How could that be? Did the Mexicans get money today, too?" Chappelle then adds, "I shouldn't have said that. Listen, I think we'll be all right, Mexicans don't watch the news." With this last minute anti-Mexican joke, the series jumps off its carefully constructed tightrope about black race relations to make fun of Mexicans with no consequence or contextualizing because the skit is over.

Similarly, on *The Office*, Dwight tries to perturb a flasher striking the parking lot by limiting the rights of female co-workers: women may not speak to strangers or wear make-up or heels taller than ¼ inch. Michael steps in, offering his support to the women: "I celebrate these women. They deserve the right to dress as they please. If Pam wants to show more cleavage, she should be able to. I encourage that." While this bit explicitly objectifies Pam, her disgusted and condemning facial expression turns the joke around so that it targets Michael's sexism and misguided political correctness. But this delicate irony is upset when Michael calls everyone into the conference room for Women's Appreciation Day. Dwight suggests: "Why doesn't Oscar run the meeting? He's a homosexual." Again, we have a last minute joke targeting another group. Without reaction from other characters, the meta-cues are missing, positioning the last minute joke meaning as more ambiguous. *South Park* also exemplifies this trend, as when the town convenes to discuss changing Christmas to a non-denominational celebration. After a list of requests to rid the town of all religious symbols, Mr. Garrison asks, "Can we get rid of all the Mexicans?" The joke is left out in the open, with no indication of how to decode the irony.

The primacy of humor, and ultimately, the problematic nature meta-disparagement, is highlighted when the series jump off this tightrope with a last minute punch line. Often, this leap is made from a carefully constructed exploration of one group to an entirely different group. These easy punch lines seem to take heat off earlier statements, while offering no time to contextualize the new target. The audience is left to deconstruct an ambiguous joke with no narrative cues. This tightrope jumping reinforces the idea that meta-disparagement humor is at once a product of and commentary on a culture of post-racialism, post-feminism, and post-political correctness. Political correctness is revealed to be a means of social control: an empty ideal nonetheless preferred to the primal prejudicial inclinations of some individuals. *South Park* takes it one step further and seems to suggest a reactionary return to uncensored prejudice. This textual analysis allowed me to develop an interpretive understanding of the construction of meta-disparagement in popular media texts.

But what is the effect of this polysemy? Given the multiple meanings embedded in each joke, what message are viewers taking away from meta-disparagement humor? Research of Selective Perception suggests that viewers will latch onto the message that matches their own viewpoints. In the next chapter, a content analysis allows me to quantify the trends uncovered here, while a survey begins to connect these themes to the audience. The survey establishes relevant viewpoints of the current American public. These three studies together establish a foundation for later experimental work that measures the effect of meta-disparagement humor on prejudice. Ultimately, I seek to test the double-edgedness of meta-disparagement humor delineated here. That is, this

type of humor indulges in stereotypes to ridicule them. What effect does this have on

audiences?

Chapter 3 – A Content Analysis Gauging the Prevalence of Meta-Disparagement Humor

and a Survey Gauging the Prevalence of Prejudice

This chapter builds a bridge between the textual analysis and experimental studies. Via discursive textual analysis, the previous chapter offered in-depth theory building. This analysis considered the construction and use of meta-disparagement humor from a qualitative, thematic perspective. Particular attention was paid to how meta-disparagement humor engages with different minorities. The present chapter seeks to quantify the findings of the textual analysis by establishing a baseline of the prevalence and acceptability of prejudice. Specifically, I employ a quantitative content analysis to measure the frequency and characteristics of meta-disparagement humor. The results establish meta-disparagement humor as a common phenomenon. Then, a survey gauges perceptions of the prevalence and justification of prejudice. The survey results suggest minorities face differing degrees of acceptability of prejudice and ridicule. Together, these findings motivate the experimental research of the remaining chapters, which measure the effects of meta-disparagement humor on women, African Americans, gay people, and Arab Americans, respectively.

Study 1

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This content analysis seeks to quantify the trends identified by the interpretive textual analysis. As the textual analysis sought to understand the dissemination of meta-

disparagement humor by considering how it relates to joke tellers and targets, the present study considers the same ideas with the specificity offered by the methodology. The research questions thus build from the patterns revealed by the textual analysis. Specifically, I seek to measure how prevalent meta-disparagement humor (MDH) is vis-à-vis non-meta-disparagement humor (NMDH). NMDH includes all jokes that are direct disparagement- which make fun of an individual or group without irony- as well as jokes that are not disparaging of any group at all. As detailed in the methods section, joke classification is binary, i.e. MDH or NMDH, for reliability purposes. Specific to the four minorities of interest, the content analysis also measures women, blacks, gay people, and Arabs, respectively, tell and are targeted by both MDH and NMDH. Building from the textual analysis, I also posit a few hypotheses. The thematic analysis revealed that women, blacks, gay people, and Arabs are positioned as minorities in meta-disparagement humor. This is achieved both by the stereotypical discourse surrounding them. Through irony, meta-disparagement humor allows otherwise socially unacceptable sentiments to be expressed. Given that the overt prejudice of NMDH is more problematic than MDH, I predict that minorities will more often be indicted in MDH than NMDH.

> *H1a: Women, blacks, gay people, and Arabs will more often be the target of MDH than NMDH.*
>
> *H1b: Women, blacks, gay people, and Arabs will more often be the tellers of MDH than NMDH.*

Given the more progressive slant of MDH, as developed by the textual analysis, I further predict that the four minorities of interest will be more included both as joke teller and targets in this type of humor compared to NMDH. I also predict that these minority groups more often serve as joke targets than tellers, speaking to a power differential, as being the target of a joke indicates less agency than the joker teller and, vice-versa: being the teller of a joke indicates greater agency than the target.

> *H2a: Women, blacks, gay people, and Arabs will more often be the targets than the tellers of NMDH.*

> *H2b: Women, blacks, gay people, and Arabs will more often be the targets than the tellers of MDH.*

Method

Five independent coders analyzed a random sample of episodes from each of the six series. They coded for type of joke, a scale that was later collapsed into a binary operationalization to indicate meta-disparagement humor (MDH) versus non-meta-disparagement humor (NMDH). They also identified the joke tellers and targets, with the open-ended responses to each being coded as women, black, gay, Arab, or other. In the case of multiple identities, contextual cues indicated which was primary for the joke to work. Thus, if X% of jokes are told by women, this does not mean that men told 100-X% of jokes, rather that female identity was not of primary importance in 100-X% of the coded jokes. In training, all of the coders coded the same episodes. In the first and second round, disagreement was discussed and resolved. In the third round, agreement was acceptable. Pairwise percent agreement for joke classification (MDH or NMDH)

ranged from 58.92% for *South Park* to 100% for *The Colbert Report*. Pairwise percent agreement for joke teller group membership ranged from 77.50% for *30 Rock* 100% for *Chappelle's Show*, *The Colbert Report*, *The Daily Show*, and *South Park* respectively. Finally, pairwise percent agreement for joke target membership ranged from 63.33% for *The Colbert Report* to 96.75% for *The Office*. It is important to note that the measures are binary (e.g. MDH / NMDH, women / not women) because reliability decreased with categorical variables. This speaks to the importance of decoding in MDH, as even trained coders varied in their joke classification.

Results

 Chappelle's Show. The *Chappelle's Show* sample includes all 25 episodes from seasons 1 and 2, for a total of 1,087 jokes. Analysis reveals that 26.40% of the series humor can be classified as meta-disparagement humor. Given creator Chappelle's vision and status as an African American, it is not surprising that blacks were more often tellers both NMDH and, more so, MDH than the other three groups. Further, blacks were more often targets of MDH and NMDH. This offers support for H1a but not H1b. Women and Arabs were more likely to use NMDH than MDH, while gay people were more likely to tell MDH, offering mixed results concerning H1a. Women, gay people, and Arabs were more likely to be targeted by NMDH than MDH, which runs against the prediction in H1b. Finally, women, gay people, and Arabs were more likely to be the targets than the tellers of both NMDH and MDH, offering support for H2a and H2b.

Table 3.1 *Chappelle's Show* percent minority teller and target

	Teller (NMDH)	Teller (MDH)	Target (NMDH)	Target (MDH)
Women	2.02	1.11	4.54	4.07
Blacks	81.59	88.52	26.86	75.93
Gays	0.38	1.11	4.41	1.11
Arabs	0.13	0	0.25	0

Figure 3.1 *Chappelle's Show* percent NMDH minority teller and target
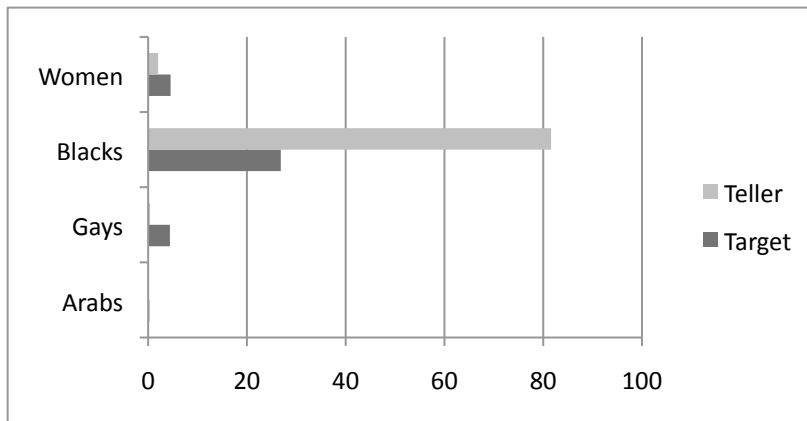
Figure 3.2 *Chappelle's Show* percent MDH minority teller and target
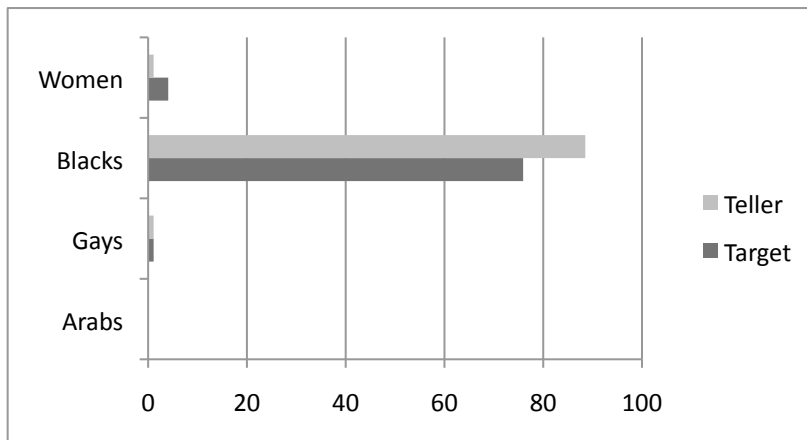
The Colbert Report. The sample for *The Colbert Report* includes 30 segments

containing a total of 414 jokes indicates. I find that 37.92% of the series humor can be

classified as meta-disparagement, the highest of all series analyzed. Table 3.2 and

Figures 3.3 and 3.4 display the percent of jokes told by and targeting the four minorities

of interest. The series is hosted by Stephen Colbert, and he serves as the exclusive joke

teller (no interviews are included in the sample), thereby naturally suppressing the

frequency of minority use of NMDH or MDH. This renders H1a and H1b inapplicable, but

offers support for H2a and H2b. Furthermore, only women and gay people were targets

of either NMDH or, more so MDH in this sample, offering partial support for H2b.

Table 3.2 *Colbert Report* percent minority teller and target

	Teller (NMDH)	Teller (MDH)	Target (NMDH)	Target (MDH)
Women	0	0	0.84	2.31
Blacks	0	0	0	0
Gays	0	0	0.42	13.85
Arabs	0	0	0	0

Figure 3.3 *The Colbert Report* percent NMDH minority teller and target
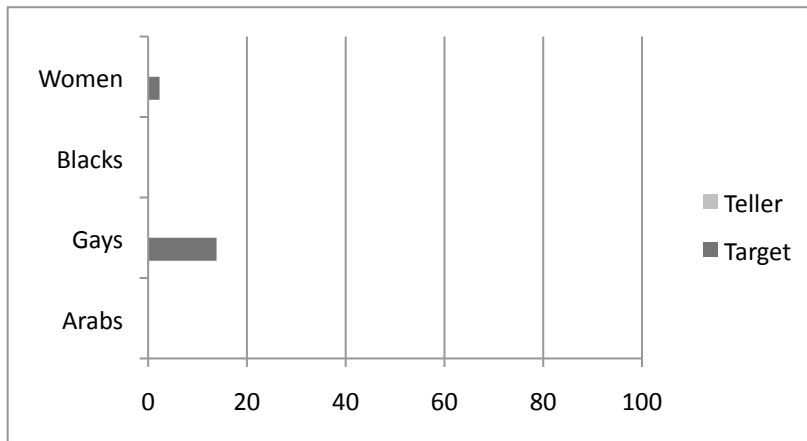
Figure 3.4 *The Colbert Report* percent MDH minority teller and target
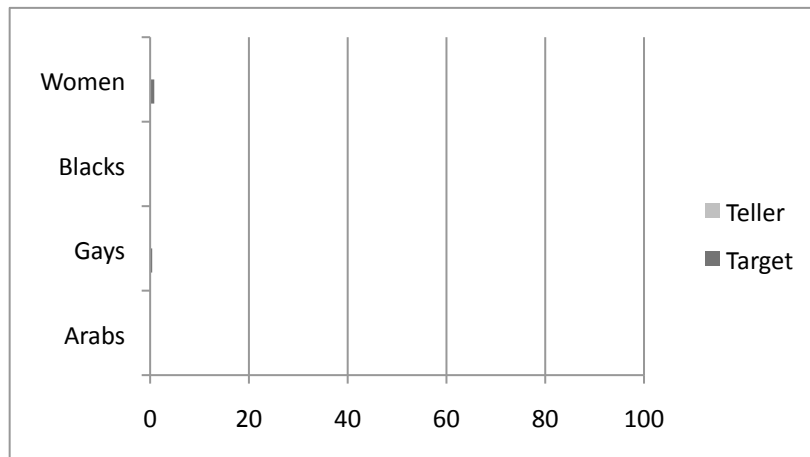
The Daily Show with Jon Stewart. According to the quantitative content analysis of 31 segments, or 385 jokes, meta-disparagement humor accounts for 25.19% of the series' humor. Brown (2010) conducted a content analysis of 1,670 jokes, finding 23.7% of the jokes to be meta-disparagement humor. Table 3.3 and Figures 3.5 and 3.6 show the percent of minority joke tellers and targets. Only women of the four groups of interest served as joke tellers, more frequently of MDH than NMDH, partially supporting H1a. Women were not, however, targets in the sample. But, blacks, gay people, and Arabs were all more often targeted by MDH than NMDH, supporting H1b. Save for women, the other three groups are more often targets than tellers of NMDH and MDH, thus supporting H2a and H2b.

Table 3.3 *The Daily Show* percent minority teller and target

	Teller (NMDH)	Teller (MDH)	Target (NMDH)	Target (MDH)
Women	0.7	1.4	0	0
Blacks	0	0	0	1.04
Gays	0	0	1.04	4.12
Arabs	0	0	1.04	10.31

Figure 3.5 *The Daily Show* percent NMDH minority teller and target
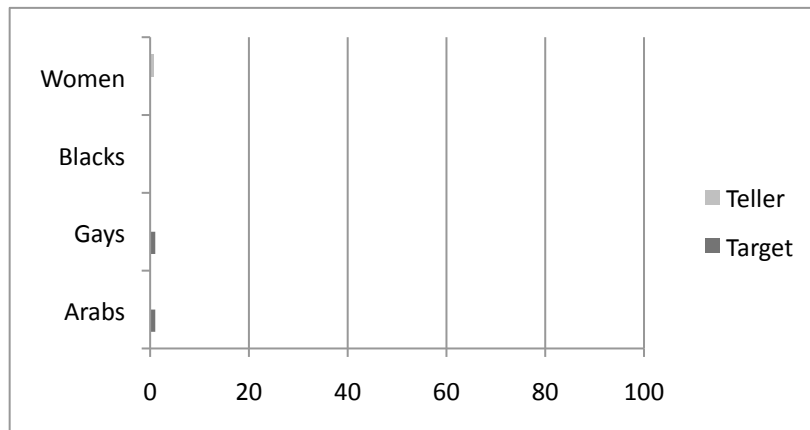
Figure 3.6 *The Daily Show* percent MDH minority teller and target
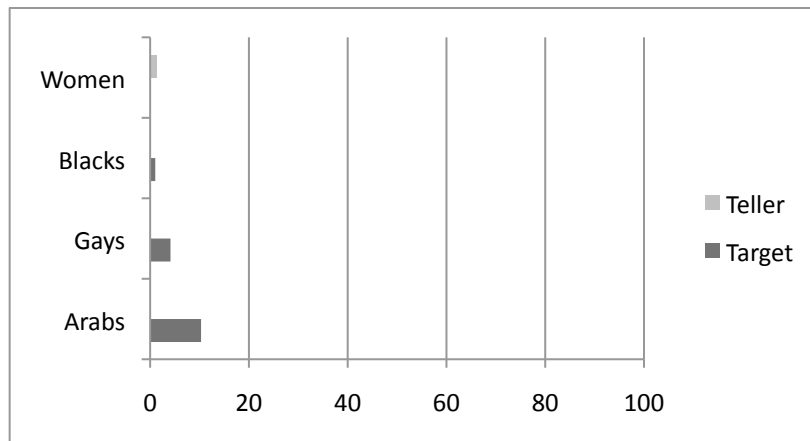
30 Rock. Based on my analysis of 28 episodes with a total of 1,830 jokes, 21.53%

of the series' humor is meta-disparagement. Table 3.4 and Figures 3.7 and 3.8 display

the percent of minority joke tellers and targets. Women were more likely to tell NMDH

than MDH, while blacks were equally likely to tell both; in this sample, gay people nor

Arabs told either kind of joke, thus offering no support for H1a. Women and gay people

were more likely to be targeted by MDH than NMDH, which the reverse was true for

blacks (again, no jokes targeted Arabs), thus offering mixed support for H1b. All three

groups indicted in the present sample were more likely to be targets than tellers of both

NMDH and MDH, thereby offering support for H2a and H2b.

Table 3.4 *30 Rock* percent minority teller and target

	Teller (NMDH)	Teller (MDH)	Target (NMDH)	Target (MDH)
Women	9.82	6.09	33.36	35.03
Blacks	3.55	3.55	15.6	13.2
Gays	0	0	0.34	3.81
Arabs	0	0	0	0

Figure 3.7 *30 Rock* percent NMDH minority teller and target
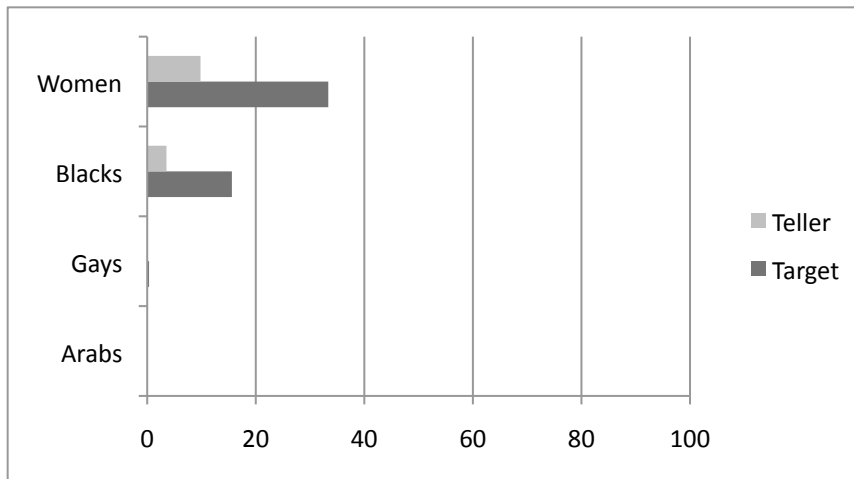
Figure 3.8 *30 Rock* percent MDH minority teller and target
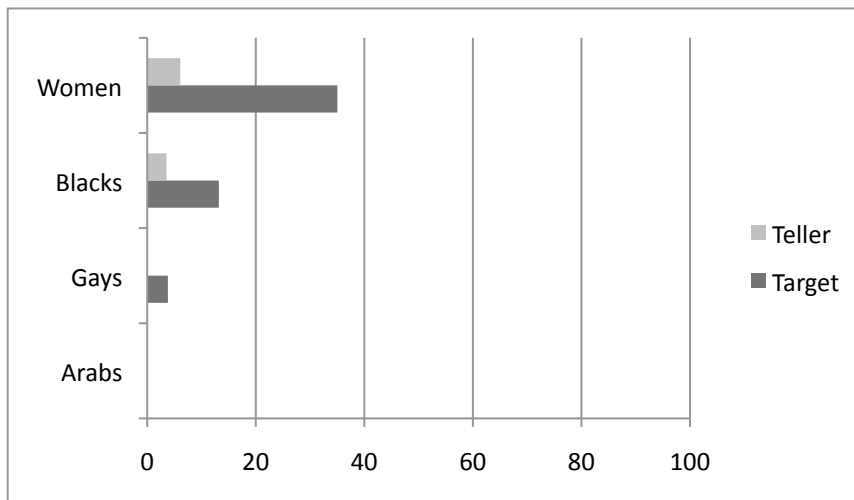
The Office. The sample from *The Office* included 27 episodes, or 1,784 jokes. Analysis finds that 23.98% of the series humor is meta-disparagement. Table 3.5 and Figures 3.9 and 3.10 show the percent of minority jokes tellers and targets. Women,

blacks, and gay people were more often to tell NMDH than MDH, contrary to H1a (while

Arabs told no jokes). Women and blacks were more often targeted by NMDH than MDH,

and vice-versa for gay people and Arabs, offering mixed results for H1b. Women and

Arabs were more likely to be targets than tellers of NMDH, while the reverse is true for

blacks and gay people, giving inconclusive evidence concerning H2a. Yet, all four groups

were more likely to be targets than tellers of MDH, thus supporting H2b.

Table 3.5 *The Office* percent minority teller and target

	Teller (NMDH)	Teller (MDH)	Target (NMDH)	Target (MDH)
Women	5.08	1.92	9.26	13.7
Blacks	0.84	0	0.49	1.68
Gays	0.9	0.24	0.77	0.48
Arabs	0	0	0.07	0

Figure 3.9 *The Office* percent NMDH minority teller and target
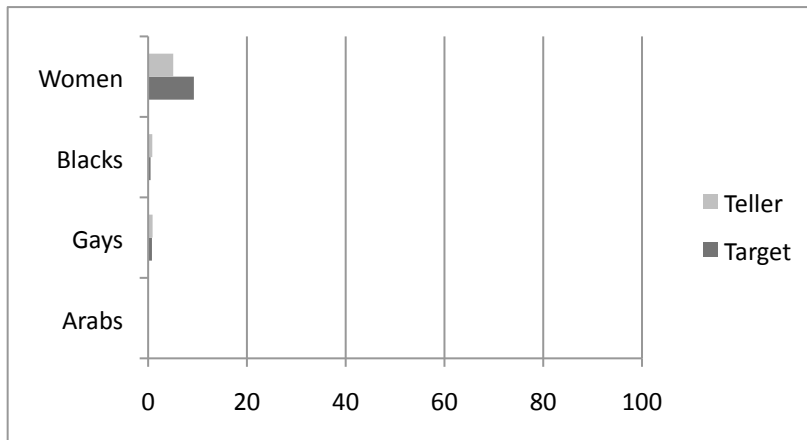
Figure 3.10 *The Office* percent MDH minority teller and target
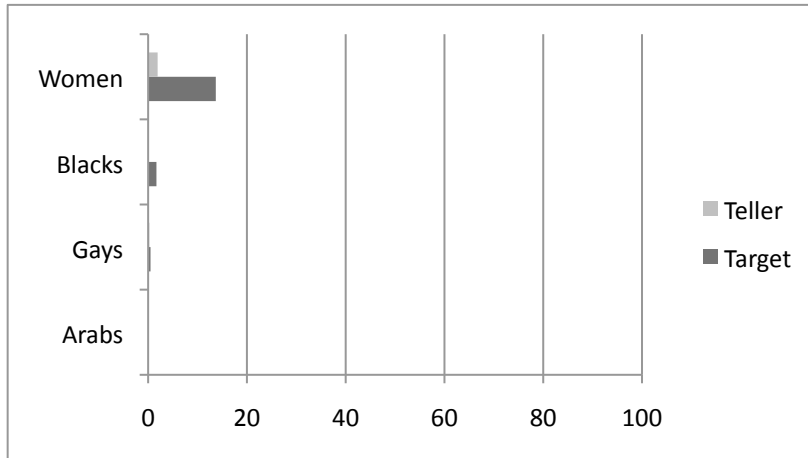
South Park. The sample for *South Park* includes 1,318 jokes from 25 episodes.

Analysis reveals that 23.67% of the series' humor can be classified as meta-

disparagement humor. Table 3.6 and Figures 3.11 and 3.12 show the percent of jokes

told by and targeting the minorities of interest. Contrary to H1a, all three groups that

told any jokes only told NMDH. As predicted by H1b, women and Arabs were more likely

to be the targets of MDH than NMDH, but the reverse is true for blacks and gays. I do

find support for H2a and H2b as all four groups were more likely to be the targets than

the tellers of both NMDH and MDH.

Table 3.6 *South Park* percent minority teller and target

	Teller (NMDH)	Teller (MDH)	Target (NMDH	Target (MDH)
Women	1.12	0	1.23	2.36
Blacks	0.61	0	1.23	0.31
Gays	0.71	0	0.82	0.31
Arabs	0	0	0	0.51

Figure 3.11 *South Park* percent NMDH minority teller and target
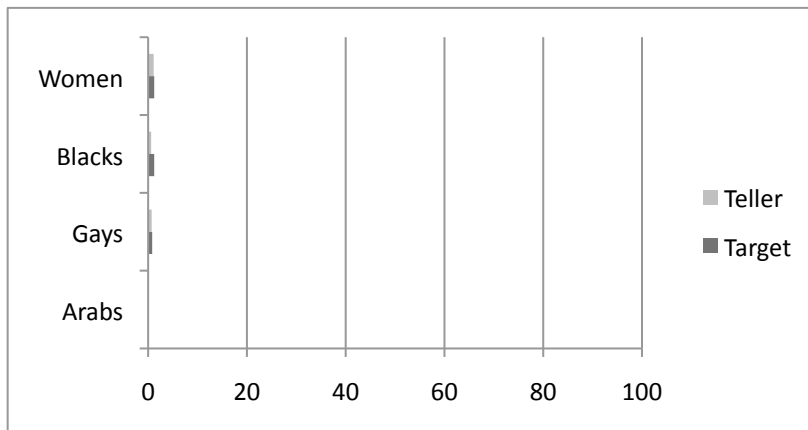
Figure 3.12 *South Park* percent MDH minority teller and target
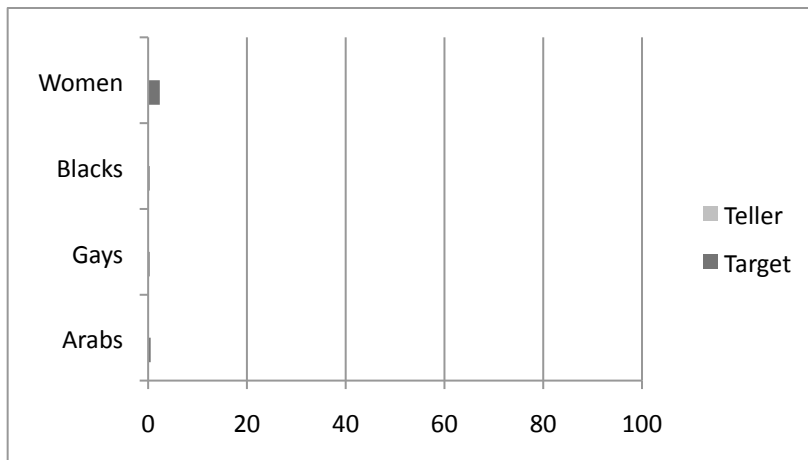
Study 1 Discussion

To conclude, I create general conclusions about meta-disparagement humor by taking each research question and hypothesis in turn. It is important to note that each of the six shows, as established by the textual analysis, is unique. Thus, when I offer macro-level percentages, I give each show a 1/6 weight instead of average at the joke level. An average of 26.46% of the humor of the series can be classified as MDH. As detailed in the methods section, NMDH refers to jokes that are simply *not* MDH, including both disparagement humor and non-disparagement humor. I now take each of the research questions and hypotheses by group.

Women delivered between 0% and 9.82% of all NDMH, with an average of 3.12%, and between 0% and 6.09% of all MDH, with an average of 1.75% of MDH. To refresh from the methods section if X% of jokes are told by women, this does not mean that men told 100-X% of jokes, rather that female identity was not of primary importance in 100-X% of the coded jokes. This applies to all of the figures concerning minorities as joke tellers and targets. The minimums and maximums are notable in that Stephen Colbert is the lone comedian on *The Colbert Report* while Tine Fey writes, produces, and stars in *30 Rock*. Women were the targets of an average of 8.21% (minimum = 0%, maximum = 33.36%) of NMDH and 9.58% (minimum = 0%, maximum = 35.03%) of MDH. Again, *30 Rock* provides the maximum for both. These percentages are notable in that, according to the US census, women account for slightly over half of the US population and are thus under-represented in the humor of these series. Contrary to predictions, women tell more NMDH than MDH but, as predicted, are more likely to be targeted by MDH than NMDH. Further, supporting hypotheses H2a and H2b, women are more often targets than tellers of both types of humor.

Blacks delivered an average of 14.43% of NMDH and 15.35% of MDH, figures driven up by the *Chappelle's Show* data, without which the rates drop to 1% and .71%, respectively. NMDH targeted blacks an average of 6.36% of the time and MDH targeted blacks an average of 15.27% of the time, figures that drop to 3.46% and 3.25% when *Chappelle's Show* data are dropped. The results vis-à-vis H1a and H1b are thus mixed depending on whether or not *Chappelle's Show* is included in the sample, while H2a and H2b find support. According to the US Census, 12.6% of the US population is black,

suggesting that, when *Chappelle's Show* is not included, blacks are similarly under-represented as joke tellers and targets of NMDH and MDH alike.

Gay people told an average of .33% of NMDH and .23% of MDH. NMDH targeted gay people an average of 1.3% of the time, while MDH targeted gay people an average of 3.95% of the time. Thus, H1a does not find support as gay people told more NMDH than MDH while H1b finds support as more MDH targeted gay people than NMDH. Gay people more often served as targets than tellers of both NMDH and MDH, offering support for H2a and H2b. Like women and blacks, gay people are likewise under-represented in both NMDH and MDH comedy, as 4% of the population identifies as gay and 1.8% identifies as bisexual (Gates, 2011).

Arabs told just .02% of NMDH, with all series but *Chappelle's Show* featuring no jokes by this group. Similarly, Arabs told 0% of MDH. Arabs served as the target of NMDH an average of .23% of the time and of MDH an average of 1.80% of the time. Arabs were more likely to tell NMDH than MDH, thus offering no support for H1a, but were more likely to be targeted by MDH than NMDH, supporting H1b. Arabs were more likely to be targeted by both MDH and NMDH, thus offering support for H2a and H2b. Americans with Arab ancestry comprised .3% of the US population in 2000, suggesting this group is likewise under-included in humor, save for as target of MDH.

Overall, the results are mixed concerning the relationship between NMDH and MDH, such that the four groups of interest appear no more likely to tell or be targeted by either type of humor, thus offering no conclusive evidence concerning H1a or H1b. The four groups of interest were, however, more likely to be the targets than the tellers

of both NMDH and MDH, which speaks to the power dynamics embodied by humor in general. Further, as supported by the population data, these groups are under-represented as tellers of MDH and NMDH, another manifestation of unbalanced power. In the next study, I further consider perceptions of the positions of women, blacks, gay people, and Arabs.

Study 2

The textual analysis of the previous chapter and content analysis of the current chapter highlight the differential treatment of minorities both vis-à-vis non-minorities and among the four minority groups of interest. Study 2 measure attitudes towards each of the groups of interest. Establishing that the four groups are viewed differently would complement the textual analysis suggestion to this effect, while motivating experimental research that considers the effects of meta-disparagement humor on each of these groups, respectively. The survey specifically asks participants to indicate how prevalent they believe discrimination against each of the four groups to be and the level of acceptability of making fun of each group and discriminating against each group.

The textual analysis finds that meta-racist humor targeting blacks is the most successful, as racism is clearly the target of these jokes. The meta-sexist jokes are similarly clear in their lampooning of sexism, with overtones of overt sexism where female objectification and sexual harassment are concerned. Meta-disparagement humor targeting gay men and lesbians and Arabs, however, at once critiques and panders to prejudice against these groups. Thus, I predict that participants will at once indicate that gay people and Arabs face more discrimination than women and blacks,

but that it is more acceptable to make jokes about and discriminate against the former groups vis-à-vis the latter groups.

Method

Participants. The sample included 98 participants (41 female) recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) in February of 2012. Berinsky, Huber, and Lens (2012) find evidence that Mechanical Turk better represent the American public than university subject pools typically used in experimental research. To maximize participation quality and ensure an American sample, I mandated that all participants live in the U.S. and have a minimum approval rating of 95%, meaning that at least 95% of survey creators rate the participants as offering quality responses. Participant age ranged from 18 to 79, with a mean of 38.35. Of the participants, 4.1% identified as Latino/a, 6.1% as Asian, 5.1% as black, 87.8% as white, and 1% each as American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and other.

Measures

Prejudice inventories. Participants first completed scales to establish baselines prejudice towards each of the four groups of interest with adapted versions of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI), Bushman & Bonacci's (2004) Arab American Prejudice Scale, Wright, Adams, & Bernat's (1999) Homophobia Scale, and the Symbolic Racism Scale.

The adapted ASI measure of sexism asks participants to indicate agreement with five statements from Glick and Fiske's (1996) original 22 questions regarding women both hostile (e.g., "Women seek to gain power by gaining control over men", α = .86)

and benevolent (e.g., "Women should be cherished and protected by men"). The Likert-scale responses range from 1 ("strongly agree") to 5 ("strongly disagree").

To gauge Arab American prejudice, I used Bushman and Bonacci's (2004) Arab American Prejudice scale, adapted under Bushman's guidance. Brown and Youmans (2012) find the adapted version to have comparable reliability compared to the original scale (.91 versus .93). Participants indicated their level of agreement with five statements about Arabs in America (e.g. "If there are too many Arabs in America, our country will be less safe") with answers ranging from 1 ("strongly agree") to 5 ("strongly disagree").

The original Homophobia Scale (Wright, Adams, & Bernat, 1999) included 25 questions, which I abbreviated to 5 based on factor loadings. Participants again indicate their level of agreement about gay people (e.g. "I fear homosexual persons will make sexual advances towards me"). Each statement was presented with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (1) to Strongly Disagree (5) (α = .84).

Finally, participants completed the eight question Symbolic Racism Scale to establish levels of racism. This scale asks participants to use a three- or four-point scale to indicate their agreement with eight statements measuring racist attitudes (e.g., "Over the past few years, Blacks have gotten more economically than they deserve", Henry & Sears; 2002; α = .67).

Prevalence of discrimination. Participants were then asked "How much discrimination is there in the United States today against each of the following groups?" Answers ranged from "A great deal" (1) to "None at all" (5). I reverse scored the answers

so that higher numbers would indicate higher perceived discrimination. The questions was presented as a grid, with women, blacks, gay people, and Arabs creating each row and answers in columns.

Acceptability of making jokes. Participants then answered, "How acceptable is it for comedians to make fun of each of the following groups?" Participants responded for women, blacks, gay people, and Arabs, again in a grid format. Answers ranged from "Very acceptable" (1) to "Very unacceptable" (5).

Justifiability of discrimination. Finally, participants answered "To what extent is discrimination towards each of the following groups justified?" Participants answered for women, blacks, gay people, and Arabs, presented in a grid format, with the following possible answers: completely justified, somewhat justified, a little justified, and not at all justified.

Results

Given that the prejudice inventories are not the same for each group, it is impossible to compare across groups. Thus, I move to the three questions presented in the grids that were identical for women, blacks, gay people, and Arabs.

Prevalence of discrimination. After answering the prejudice scales for each group, with the group order counter-balanced, participants were asked, "How much discrimination is there in the United States today against each of the following groups?" for women, blacks, gay people, and Arabs. Then, given the within-subjects design, I estimate a repeated measures ANOVA. Because Mauchley's test of sphericity indicated that the data for this question violate sphericity assumptions (χ^2 = 33.34, df = 8, *p* =

0.000), I performed a Greenhouse-Geisser correction. The ANOVA with this correction is significant ($F(2.51, 243.04) = 69.90$, $P = .000$), indicating mean scores for this measure varied within each person by minority (women: $M = 2.56$, $SD = .91$, blacks: $M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.02$, gays: $M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.07$, Arabs: $M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.05$). Post hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction revealed all pairwise comparisons to be significantly different (all ps ≤ .001). Figure 3.13 displays the mean values.

These results are interesting in that they run opposite to the frequency of joke target of NMDH and MDH. That is, perhaps it is acceptable to make fun of groups that appear to face less discrimination. This speaks to meta-disparagement humor as a manifestation of post-sexism and post-racialism in particular.

Figure 3.13 Perceived Prevalence of Discrimination by Group
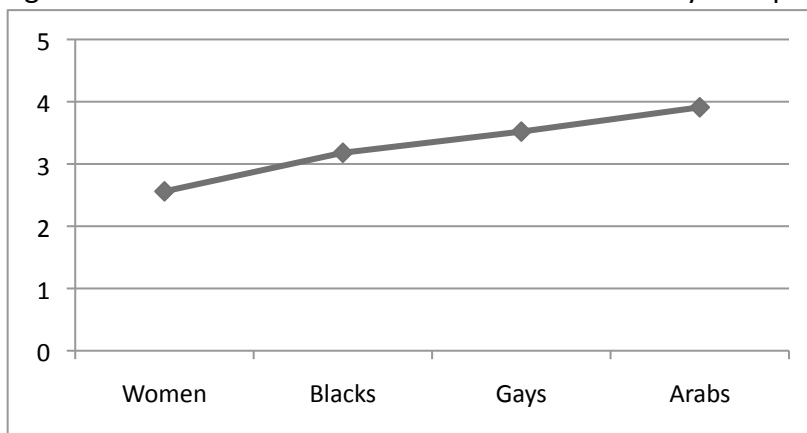
Acceptability of making jokes. I reverse scored the answers so that higher numbers would indicate greater levels of acceptability. I again estimate a repeated measures ANOVA. Here, Mauchley's test of sphericity indicate the data for this question comply with sphericity assumptions ($\chi^2 = 4.88$, df = 5, $p = 0.43$). The ANOVA with sphericity assumed is significant ($F(3, 288) = 5.60$, $p = .001$), indicating that the mean scores for this measure varied within each person by minority (women: $M = 3.57$, $SD =$

1.47, blacks: *M* = 3.28, *SD* = 1.49, gays: *M* = 3.32, *SD* = 1.45, Arabs: *M* = 3.39, *SD* = 1.46).

Post hoc tests with a Bonferroni correction reveal significant differences between the

acceptability of making fun of women and black (p = .000) and women and gay people

(*p* = .01). That is, it is more acceptable to make fun of women than both blacks and gay

people. Figure 3.14 displays the mean values. This maps onto the content analysis

findings, as women were most often the targets of both MDH and NMDH.

Figure 3.14 Acceptability of Making Jokes by Group
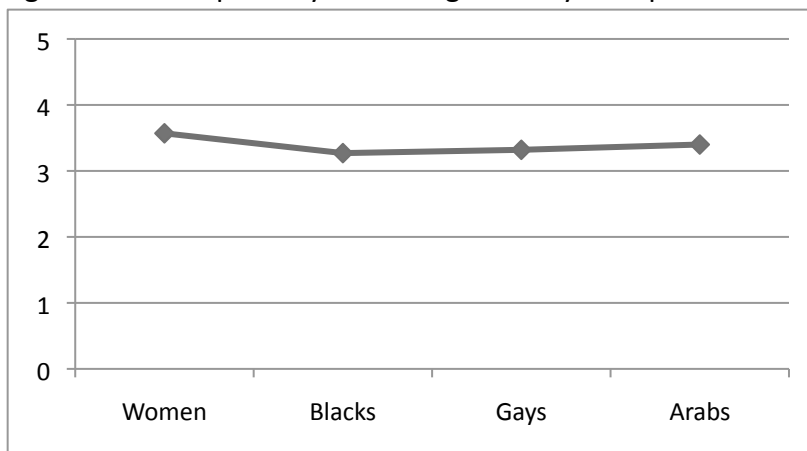
Justifiability of discrimination. I reverse scored responses so that higher

numbers indicate greater endorsement of discrimination. Because Mauchley's test of

sphericity indicates that the data for this question violate sphericity assumptions (χ^2 =

30.82, df = 5, *p* = 0.000), I performed a Greenhouse-Geisser correction to the repeated

measure ANOVA, which is significant (*F*(2.55, 247.58) = 6.77, *p* = .000), indicating that

the mean scores for this measure varied within each person by minority (women: *M* =

1.17, *SD* = .46, blacks: *M* = 1.24, *SD* = .64, gays: *M* = 1.24, *SD* = .63, Arabs: *M* = 1.44, *SD*

= .86). Post hoc tests with a Bonferroni correction reveals significant differences

between the justifiability of discrimination against Arabs and women (*p* = .004), Arabs

and blacks (p = .009), and Arabs and gay people (p = .03), such that discrimination against Arabs is perceived to be more justified than discrimination against any other group. Figure 3.15 displays the mean values. While discrimination against Arabs is the most justified, both types of humor least often targeted Arabs. This speaks to the idea that humor is a less problematic form of discrimination.

Figure 3.15 Justifiability of Discrimination by Group
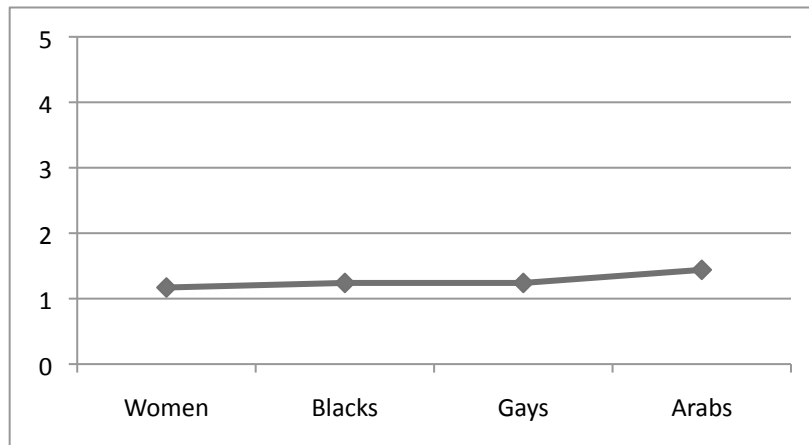
Conclusion

Study 1's content analysis reveals that women in these shows are most likely to be joke tellers and targets of both NMDH and MDH, followed by blacks, gay people, and Arabs. The proportion of tellers and targets did not vary by humor type. All four groups are more likely to be joke targets than tellers. That these groups are more likely to be put down than to put others down speaks to the power differentials embodied in humor.

The survey of Study 2 establishes baseline perceptions of the four groups that help tell the whole story of the content analysis. Specifically, responses indicate it is significantly more acceptable to make fun of women than blacks and gay people, mirroring the position of women as the most common joke target of the four groups.

Responses also suggest that Arabs, followed by gay people, blacks, and women are perceived to face the most discrimination, the inverse of the frequency of joke target. Further, while participant responses suggest discrimination against Arabs is more justified than that against the other groups, Arabs were the least common target. Taken together, these findings speak to the idea that discrimination and humor, both with and without irony, are not one in the same. Further, it appears to be more acceptable to ridicule groups that are perceived as facing less discrimination. This suggests that humor allows a socially acceptable profession of prejudice that becomes more acceptable as other discrimination towards a given groups decreases. Humor is thus positioned as less problematic than discrimination. It is important to note, however, that social desirability likely played a role here. Further, all of these questions were asked in a row, likely heightening participant awareness of the stakes of the questions. Social desirability in this case means that the numbers presented are conservative estimates. That is, levels of the acceptability of making fun of and discrimination toward these groups is likely even higher than that reported here.

Taken together, the textual analysis, content analysis, and survey provide a preliminary exploration of the dissemination of meta-disparagement humor. Yet all three methodologies are fundamentally descriptive. Hall (1997), citing Sean Nixon, asserts:

(We must give) due regard to the processes of articulation between these images… and their consumers in order to understand the way in which the images might have transformed the masculinity of particular groups of men.

Getting at this process requires moving away from the moment of representation towards a different moment in the circuit of culture: the moment of consumption (p. 329)

As I am ultimately interested in the *effects* of meta-disparagement humor, I move now to the experimental studies.

Chapter 4 – Measuring the Impact of (Meta-) Sexist Humor on Stereotype Activation and

Application

In this chapter, I focus on meta-disparagement humor that targets women, or meta-sexist humor. As a symptom of post-feminism, this type of humor relies on sexist stereotypes under the guise of ridiculing prejudice. The content analysis revealed that women are the most common target of both meta-disparagement humor and non-meta-disparagement humor. Further, the survey indicates the public believes jokes making fun of women to be the most acceptable of my four groups of interest. Little is known, however, about whether such ironic comedic content actually reduces prejudice. Some theories of humor suggest this content may actually increase reliance on stereotypes or the expression of sexist attitudes, at least among some audience segments. Research on stereotype activation (e.g., Devine, 1989) and effects of disparagement humor (e.g., Ford, 2000) support this possibility.

The present chapter tests the effect of this type of humor on both stereotype activation and application. To measure stereotype activation, participants complete a Lexical Decision Task (LDT) that measures reaction times to sexist words. To measure stereotype application, participants evaluate the résumé of a potential job candidate.[3]

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[3] I am deeply indebted to my research partner Diana Betz (Ph.D. Candidate, Social Psychology, The University of Michigan), with whom I designed, executed, and analyzed all experiments presented in the dissertation.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

The present study builds on the literature review presented in Chapter 1. In developing the current hypotheses, I restate key points from this review to theoretically ground the current study.

A popular theory of humor holds that jokes allow socially unacceptable sentiments to be expressed, as the humor frame casts our otherwise offensive words as inoffensive (Ford, 2000; Freud, 1905, 2002; Lyman, 1987; Martineau, 1972). Ford and Ferguson (2004) note that disparagement humor that targets minorities, "increases tolerance of discriminatory events for people high in prejudice toward the disparaged groups" (p. 79), while also reinforcing stereotypes. In fact, several studies support the claim that disparagement humor has harmful consequences (Hobden & Olson, 1994; Maio, Olson, & Bush, 1997; Martin, 2007). As developed in the previous chapters, meta-disparagement humor adds irony to direct disparagement humor. While the explicit level of these jokes overtly uses stereotypes to make fun of a minority, the irony shifts the true joke target to prejudice itself. The implicit target of meta-disparagement humor—prejudice itself—can be summoned through the joke's content (e.g., exaggerated use of stereotypes); the joke-teller's delivery (e.g., tone of voice, facial expression, body language); and/or background information about the political or social views of the joke-teller. The present chapter considers the effects of direct sexist and meta-sexist humor on stereotype activation and application.

Stereotypes are traits linked together in a cognitive structure (Bargh, Chen, and Burrows, 1996; Berinsky & Mendelberg, 2005; Stephan & Stephan, 1993). According to

spreading activation theory, when one stereotype about a group is activated, other stereotypes about that group become active (Berinsky & Mendelberg, 2005; Stephan & Stephan, 1993; Valentino, 1999). Several studies support spreading activation theory (Mendelberg, 1997; Valentino, 1999; Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002). Stereotype activation refers to whether or not stereotypes are accessible or salient (Kunda & Spencer, 2003). Stereotype activation is an unconscious process (Greenwald and Banaji, 1994). That is, the stereotypes are active regardless of baseline prejudice or belief in egalitarianism. Research suggests that humor can activate stereotypes, as it induces non-critical processing. Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) posits two mental routes for information processing. If an individual is motivated to partake in effortful processing, the central route is taken whereby persuasion depends on argument strength. If an individual is not motivated to effortfully process, then the peripheral route is taken whereby persuasion depends on source traits. Because humor induces mirth and this positive affect decreases the likelihood of effortful processing, humor messages likely take the peripheral route (Baumgartner & Morris, 2008; Martin, 2007; Young, 2008; Zhang, 1996). Ford and Ferguson (2004) argue that humor invokes a particular frame—a "conversational rule of levity" (p. 82) that protects the message of the joke from criticism and actually boosts the negative impact of exposure. On the other hand, they found that people told to read sexist humor *critically* were not negatively affected by it.

Because both direct sexist humor and meta-sexist humor trade in stereotypes, neither the framing nor audience predispositions will influence stereotype activation. Rather, because both use stereotypes to comedic effect, both types of humor will make

stereotypes salient for all viewers. In this experiment, I exposed participants to one of three humor types: direct sexist humor (DSH), meta-sexist humor (MSH), and non-disparagement (control). Thus, I propose the following hypothesis:

H1: DSH and MSH will boost stereotype activation, regardless of baseline sexism.

Where stereotype activation refers to accessibility, stereotype application is defined as "the extent to which one uses a stereotype to judge a member of the stereotyped group" (Kunda & Spencer, 2003; p. 522). As reviewed above, the literature suggests direct disparagement humor can increase prejudice toward the targeted group directly. Further, individuals high in sexism will be less likely to engage in stereotype suppression (Devine, 1989; Lepore & Brown, 1997). On the flip side, participants low in sexism are able to suppress activated stereotypes (Devine, 1989; Lepore & Brown, 1997). Because DSH violates the values of those low in sexism, they will be motivated to effortfully process the material. By taking the central route, the message will be critically processed, allowing the individual to suppress the stereotype. That is, while the stereotypes are activated, those low in sexism are less likely to apply them. I therefore propose the following hypothesis regarding stereotype application, as measured by evaluations of a female job candidate.

H2a: DSH will boost sexism in evaluating a female job candidate for those high in

baseline sexism. Those low in baseline sexism will be unaffected by DSH.

Previous research shows that sexist attitudes predict whether one interprets sexist humor through a frame of levity and thus infers a norm of tolerance for sexism (Ford et al., 2008). Vidmar and Rokeach's (1974) study of *All in the Family* and Cooks and

Orbe's (1993) study of *In Living Color* found that the respective series reinforced existing racial attitudes. Similarly, researchers have found that Stephen Colbert's right-wing pundit persona on *Daily Show* spin-off *The Colbert Report*, ostensibly meant to satirically undermine the Republican agenda, is interpreted in a manner consistent with viewer's own political ideology (LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009).

Given our tendency to impose our own worldviews on meta-disparagement humor, I predict that individuals with strong baseline sexism will be more likely to respond to meta-sexist jokes as though they were straightforwardly disparaging. Thus, this type of humor should have the same effects on these individuals as DSH. But where those demonstrating lower levels of sexism are likely to reject the stereotypes of DSH, the irony of MSH adds a level comically appealing to this group. Because the mirth induced by the comedy of the meta-level will depress critical processing, those low in baseline sexism will not be able to suppress the activated stereotypes. As such, I propose the following hypothesis:

> *H2b: MSH will boost sexism in evaluating a female job candidate, regardless of baseline sexism.*

Method

Participants

During the winter 2010 semester, 138 participants (75.36% female) participated in exchange for course credit for introduction to psychology (25 Ps) or introduction to communications (113 Ps) courses at the University of Michigan. 104 participants were female. Of the participants, 72.46% identified as white, 13.04% as Asian, .652% as black,

and 7.98% identified as "other." The mean age was 18.9 years. Self-reported political ideology on a 7-point scale averaged at 3.28, or moderate to somewhat liberal. Due to computer malfunctions (6 Ps) and failure to complete the prescreen (17 Ps), the final sample included 115 participants.

Procedure

Participants first completed an abbreviated Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI), to establish baseline sexism, as part of a mandatory prescreen for the psychology pool and as part of Media and Attitudes study presented as Part 1 for those in the communications pool. Several days later, participants from the both subject pools came into a psychology computer lab for the experiment, pitched as an investigation of the effect of comedy or drama on memory. Seated in individual cubicles outfitted with Apple computers and headphones, participants were then randomized into one of three humor clip conditions: sexist humor (DSH), meta-sexist humor (MSH), or control humor (a clip that did not implicate gender or related themes). Participants watched and rated the clips. The Lexical Decision Task (LDT) and résumé task were then presented as filler items included as a favor to another researcher and to waste time before the memory questions. Finally, all participants answered basic demographic questions, including political ideology, and were debriefed.

Materials

Prescreen. An abbreviated version of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) was included as part of a mandatory prescreen for the psychology pool and as part of Media and Attitudes study presented as Part 1 for those in the communications pool. The ASI is

a scale that assesses attitudes that are hostile towards women (e.g., beliefs that women are controlling, clingy, and sexually withholding) as well as benevolent (e.g., beliefs that women are more pure and moral than men, and thus more in need of protection) (Glick & Fiske, 1996). From the original 22 questions, six were chosen based on factor loading; three questions relating to benevolent sexism and three relating to hostile sexism. The reliability of benevolent sexism ASI scores was .86 (M = 3.2 (out of 6), SD = .93). The reliability of hostile sexism ASI scores was .76 (M = 3.46 (out of 6), SD = .77).

Humor stimuli. All participants viewed three short television clips. In addition to two neutral comedy clips (from *Saturday Night Live* and *The Office*), participants in the sexist humor condition viewed clips from *How I Met Your Mother* and *Blue Mountain State*, while participants in the meta-sexist condition viewed clips from *Da Ali G Show* and *The Office*. Participants in the control condition watched additional non-disparagement clips from *How I Met Your Mother* and *Entourage*. Detailed descriptions of each clip can be found in the appendix.

Clip ratings. After each clip, participants were asked to briefly describe the clip. Then, they used a slide-bar feeling thermometer with scores ranging from 0 to 100 to rate how enjoyable, funny, and offensive it was. Participants also indicated series familiarity on a 3-point scale, ranging from "not at all familiar" to "very familiar." Participants also provided written responses to the following question, "Do you think this clip makes fun of anyone? If so, whom?" Answers to this question were coded to assess participants' perceptions of sexist vs. meta-sexist clips. To ensure the manipulations worked as intended, I estimated ANOVAs for funniness and offensiveness

by condition. DSH clips were rated as less funny (M = 46.51, SD = 22.33) than either the MSH clips (M = 58.59, SD = 21.78) or control clips (M = 61.48, SD = 21.73). Both the DSH (M = 30.28, SD = 25.06) and MSH (M = 36.5, SD = 22.26) were rated as more offensive than the control clips (M = 10.96, SD = 14.64).

Stereotype activation. Pitched as a study for another researcher included as a filler task between the clips and the memory question, participants then completed a Lexical Decision Task (LDT) that presented sexist words, neutral words, and nonsense letter strings in random order. Participants indicated whether the "word" presented on screen was a word or non-word. Female stereotype words included five words from each of the following type of stereotypes: woman as nurturer (e.g., "mother") and sex object (e.g., "bimbo," Rudman & Borgida, 1995); a general female stereotype (e.g., "weak," Davies, Spencer, Quinn, & Gerhardstein, 2002); and ambiguous words that, depending on the context, may stereotype women (e.g., "strip," Rudman & Borgida, 1995). For a full list of sexist words by category, please refer to the appendix. Neutral words were matched to stereotype words on length and frequency in the English language (UWA, 2010). The average speed with which participants correctly categorized the stereotypic words was used as an indicator of the salience of that stereotypic concept. Mean reaction times in milliseconds for length-and-frequency-matched neutral words were included as a covariate in all analyses to control for participants own' average reaction times, and only correct responses were included in the analyses (Davies et al, 2002). Fast outliers were recoded to the floor value of 250ms and slow outliers to the ceiling value of 2000ms (Fazio et al., 1997).

Stereotype application. Participants then viewed a résumé for a recent college graduate, designed to be mediocre job candidate (e.g., 3.1 GPA, limited work experience). Participants were randomized into one of two conditions, male or female. Both saw identical résumés, but the name changed from Kevin Miller to Emily Miller, both first names being the 19th most popular in 1987, the likely birth year of the job candidate given the study run date. Participants then evaluated the job candidate on several attributes using a 7-point Likert scale. The attributes included male-typed competence traits (capable, efficient, organized, skillful; α = .82) and female-typed warmth traits (good-natured, sincere, warm, trustworthy; α = .82; Cuddy et al., 2004), as well as filler traits. Participants were asked several evaluative questions about the job candidate, including likelihood of granting an interview, likelihood of hiring, and likelihood of promoting in the first year, all on a 6-point scale ranging from "very unlikely" to "very likely." These were additively combined to form a hiring index variable (α = .84). Finally, participants indicated the starting salary they would offer the candidate, ranging from less than $20,000 to more than $60,000, with eight options in between increasing in $5,000 increments.

<div align="center">

Results

</div>

Stereotype Activation

To test H1, I analyze the LDT data. In this context, stereotype activation is operationalized as faster reaction time to words related to female stereotypes. Thus, I estimate three ANCOVAs to gauge the effect of humor condition on reaction time to words related to the four female stereotype subtypes (nurturer, sex object, and

ambiguous words with multiple meanings). Reaction time to neutral words is included as a covariate. While none of the ANCOVAs are significant, some of the planned contrasts comparing clip conditions are. For stereotypes related to women as nurturers, participants in both the DSH (M = 576.03, SD = 87.04) and MSH (M = 577.14, SD = 105.17) conditions reacted more quickly to these words than those in the control condition (M = 602.83, SD = 95.07) (P = .10). For females as sex objects, those in the MSH condition (M = 571.17, SD = 96.00) responded faster (p = .05) to these stereotypical words than those in the control condition (M = 626.95, SD = 120.62). The ANCOVA for ambiguously objectifying words is marginally significant ($F(1,119)$ = 2.93, p = .09). A post-hoc contrast find a significant difference ($F(1,119)$ = 3.98, p = .05) between those in the MSH (M = 571.15ms, SD = 96.0) and control condition (M = 626.95ms, SD = 122.6). Yet, with Bonferroni corrections, significance is lost. Thus, I find results that are trending as expected, offering partial support for H1.

Stereotype Application

Next, I tested H2a, the prediction that DSH will boost sexist reactions to a female job candidate among those high in baseline sexism, while having little or no effect among those low in sexism. I also tested H1b, which predicted MSH would boost sexism toward female job candidates regardless of baseline attitudes toward women. I estimate a hierarchical regression with centered prescreen ASI scores and participant gender in the first level of the model. The second level of the model includes résumé gender, a dummy coded DSH condition variable (1 if in MSH, 0 if not), and dummy coded MSH condition variable (1 if in DSH, 0 if not). The third level of the models includes all

two-way interactions between clip condition and centered prescreen, clip condition and

résumé gender, and centered presecreen and résumé gender. And the fourth level of

the model includes three- way interactions between clip condition, centered prescreen,

and résumé gender. I estimate the model four times, finding it to be non-significant at

all levels (I report the highest levels) with all predictor variables for each of the following

dependent variables: (1) competence ratings ($F(12,119)$ = .60, p = .84), (2) warmth

ratings ($F(12,119)$ = 1.03, p = .43)[4], (3) hiring index ($F(12,119)$ = 1.13, p = .35)[5], and (4)

proposed salary ($F(12,119)$ = 1.14 p = .34). Thus, I do not find support for H2a or H2b.

Tables 4.1 – 4.4 display the regression results.[6]

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[4] The second level of the warmth model is marginally significant ($F(5,119)$ = 2.05, p = .07).
[5] The first level of the hiring index model is marginally significant ($F(2,119)$ = 3.07, p = .05).
[6] It is important to note that the centered prescreen ASI score does not appear to predict the outcome variables. This is a composite of ambivalent and hostile sexism, thus introducing the possibility that each type of sexism behaves differently. However, estimating the regressions with an ambivalent and hostile sexism score individually does not change the significance of the models.

Table 4.1 Competence Ratings Regression Analysis

	B (SE)	p
Constant	5.33 (.60)	.000***
Prescreen	.04 (.47)	.94
Gender	.17 (.22)	.44
Résumé	-.28 (.30)	.36
DDH	-.94 (.70)	.19
MDH	-.50 (.70)	.46
DDH*Prescreen	.41 (.62)	.51
MDH*Prescreen	.33 (.54)	.55
DDH*Résumé	.49 (.45)	.28
MDH*Résumé	.29 (.42)	.49
Prescreen*Résumé	-.41 (.26)	.88
DDH*Prescreen*Résumé	-.14 (.36)	.70
MDH*Prescreen*Résumé	-.12 (.32)	.70

†p < **.10. ***p < **.05. ****p < **.01. *****p < **.001.**

Table 4.2 Warmth Ratings Regression Analysis

	B (SE)	p
Constant	5.41 (.58)	.000***
Prescreen	-.17 (.45)	.71
Gender	.19 (.21)	.38
Résumé	-.11 (.29)	.72
DDH	-.49 (.69)	.47
MDH	-.46 (.66)	.49
DDH*Prescreen	.54 (.60)	.38
MDH*Prescreen	.50 (.53)	.32
DDH*Résumé	.01 (.44)	.99
MDH*Résumé	.18 (.40)	.67
Prescreen*Résumé	.14 (.25)	.58
DDH*Prescreen*Résumé	-.27 (.35)	.44
MDH*Prescreen*Résumé	-.32 (.31)	.31

†p < **.10. ***p < **.05. ****p < **.01. *****p < **.001.**

Table 4.3 Hiring Index Regression Analysis

	B (SE)	p
Constant	3.83 (.51)	.000***
Prescreen	-.21 (.37)	.59
Gender	.42 (.18)	.02
Résumé	-.32 (.26)	.23
DDH	-.83 (.60)	.17
MDH	.00 (.58)	1.00
DDH*Prescreen	.73 (.53)	.17
MDH*Prescreen	.25 (.46)	.59
DDH*Résumé	.42 (.38)	.28
MDH*Résumé	-.07 (.35)	.84
Precreseen*Résumé	.12 (.22)	.60
DDH*Prescreen*Résumé	-.45 (.31)	.15
MDH*Prescreen*Résumé	-.14 (.27)	.60

†p < **.10.** *****p < **.05.** ******p < **.01.** *******p < **.001.**

Table 4.4 Salary Regression Analysis

	B (SE)	p
Constant	7.14 (1.23)	.000***
Prescreen	1.26 (1.01)	.22
Gender	-.35 (.47)	.46
Résumé	-1.34 (.66)	.04
DDH	-.2.19 (1.35)	.69
MDH	-.55 (1.48)	.24
DDH*Prescreen	-.55 (1.35)	.69
MDH*Prescreen	-1.38 (1.18)	.25
DDH*Résumé	1.31 (.98)	.18
MDH*Résumé	1.08 (.90)	.24
Prescreen*Résumé	-.59 (.56)	.30
DDH*Prescreen*Résumé	-.03 (.78)	.97
MDH*Prescreen*Résumé	-.70 (.69)	.31

†p < **.10.** *****p < **.05.** ******p < **.01.** *******p < **.001.**

Discussion and Conclusion

The present chapter considers the effect of meta-sexist humor on stereotype activation and application. Results suggest that both sexist and, more so, meta-sexist humor, may activate sexist stereotypes. This offers partial and trending support for H1, which posits that both direct sexist humor (DSH) and meta-sexist humor (MSH) will boost stereotype activation, regardless of baseline sexism. This in turn supports the notion that humor, regardless of its framing, induces a positive mood which in turn facilitates peripheral processing. This peripheral processing renders individuals more susceptible to the messages of the humor, which in turn enables stereotype activation. It is important to note, however, that the clips used in the control condition did not mention women at all. Thus, results could also be attributed to simply invoking women.

The results vis-à-vis stereotype application were null, suggesting neither direct sexist humor nor meta-sexist humor influenced hiring decisions of women versus men. This runs contrary to H2a, which predicted that DSH will boost sexism in evaluating a female job candidate for those high in baseline sexism. Those low in baseline sexism will be unaffected by DSH. While the results technically support the second part of this hypothesis, this null finding regarding those low in baseline sexism would only be theoretically interesting in the context of significant findings for those high in sexism. I also did not find support for H2b, that MSH will boost sexism in evaluating a female job candidate, regardless of baseline sexism.

Yet stereotype suppression is not only moderated by low levels of prejudice, but also internalized ideals of egalitarianism (Amodio, Devine, & Harmon-Jones; 2008; Bargh,

Chen, and Burrows, 1996; Devine, Plant, Amodio, Harmon-Jones, & Vance, 2002). Thus, it is possible that this sample consisted of individuals who internalized this value, which in turn enabled stereotype suppression regardless of baseline prejudice level. As presented in Chapter 3, discrimination against women is seen as less acceptable than discrimination of blacks, gay individuals, or Arabs, speaking to the heightened potential for sexist stereotype suppression. Future studies could therefore pre-test for egalitarianism, in addition to levels of sexism. The current null results suggest that audiences are sophisticated and egalitarian in their engagement with both DSH and MSH. That is, where the results suggest both types of humor may activate stereotypes, viewers are able to suppress the stereotypes, not using them in the evaluation of a female job candidate.

Several additional factors may have contributed to the null finding in this test. This study relies on just a few minutes of clips as the independent variable. To this end, as suggested by the content analysis, sexist and meta-sexist humor are more prevalent than jokes targeting the other three groups considered in this dissertation. Thus, it may take higher levels of exposure to trigger a measurable effect. Further, the survey presented in Chapter 3 suggests that jokes directly targeting women are seen as more acceptable than jokes targeting the other groups. Perhaps audiences are habituated to sexist and meta-sexist humor and, thus, more accustomed to suppressing the stereotypes they activate. Future studies could measure the effects of long-term exposure to this type of humor, either by manipulating long-term exposure in a field experiment or by collecting longitudinal data on viewing habits and levels of sexism.

The manipulation checks find that participants rated the DSH clips as less funny than either MSH or control clips. Participants also rated DSH and MSH more offensive than the control. It is possible that the different levels of humor between DSH and MSH created noise and may explain why MSH had a greater effect on the LDT task. Finally, it is possible that the operationalization of stereotype application was not sensitive enough to pick up movement. Future studies could therefore consider alternative outcome variables. Future studies could also consider meta-disparagement humor in the context of other groups The following experimental chapters extend the present study in these two ways. Chapter 5 measures the effects of meta-homophobic and meta-anti-Arab humor on stereotype application in a public opinion context. Chapter 6 considers the effect of comedian ingroup / outgroup status in telling meta-racist humor on perceptions of the prevalence of discrimination, levels of racism, and evaluations of a black or white political candidate.

Chapter 5 – Measuring the Impact of (Meta-) Homophobic Humor and Anti-Arab Humor

on Stereotype Application

The previous chapter considered the effect of meta-sexist humor on stereotype

activation using a Lexical Decision Task (LDT) and stereotype application in the context

of evaluation of a female job candidate. The present chapter measures the effects of

(meta-) homophobic and anti-Arab humor in a public opinion context. This type of

humor employs stereotypes to ridicule prejudice itself. But does this form of humor

actually undermine prejudice, or might it make things worse?

The present chapter assesses the effects of direct and meta- homophobic humor,

and direct and meta- anti-Arab humor on support for public policies pertaining to gay

rights and Arab rights, respectively. I consider homophobic and anti-Arab humor in

tandem because, as revealed by the survey in Chapter 3, these groups group have the

highest perceived prevalence of discrimination and similar rates of acceptability of

making fun of these groups. Further, the textual analysis presented in Chapter 2

suggests that the meta-disparagement humor targeting these groups both critiques and

panders to prejudice.

The present study also extends the range of potential impact to other groups. To

this end, I propose what I call "super spreading activation theory." Jokes that use

stereotypes to target one group may not only activate other stereotypes about that

group (spreading activation theory), but also stereotypes about other disparaged

minority groups (super spreading activation theory). In the next section, I offer a brief recap of my hypotheses. The deeper motivation for the hypotheses can be found in Chapter 4, while a comprehensive literature review can be found in Chapter 1.

Hypotheses

The present experiments expose participants to one of three humor types: direct disparagement humor (DDH) of either gay people (Study 1) or Arabs (Study 2), meta-disparagement humor (MDH) of either gay people (Study 1) or Arabs (Study 2), and non-disparagement (control). Spreading activation theory suggests that once one stereotype about a group is active, other stereotypes about that group become salient (Berinsky & Mendelberg, 2005; Mendelberg, 1997; Stephan & Stephan, 1993; Valentino, 1999; Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002). This unconscious process (Greenwald and Banaji, 1994) may be facilitated by comedic framing, which depresses critical processing and induces processing via Elaboration Likelihood Model's (ELM's) peripheral route (Baumgartner & Morris, 2008; Bless & Fiedler, 1995; Ford & Ferguson, 2004; Martin, 2007; Young, 2008; Zhang, 1996). The present studies assume stereotype activation and move to gauge stereotype application, or the use of stereotypes in judgments of a group or group member (Kunda & Spencer, 2003). Here, I measure stereotype application as support for policies concerning the groups in question.

Following the motivation for H2a regarding stereotype activation in the previous chapter, research suggests that direct disparagement humor towards a given group can increase prejudice toward that (Ford & Ferguson, 2004; Hobden & Olsen, 1994; Maio, Olson, & Bush, 1997; Martin 2007). Where individuals low in prejudice are able to

suppress activated stereotypes, individuals high in prejudice are less able or inclined to do so (Devine, 1989; Lepore & Brown, 1997). I predict that individuals high in prejudice toward group X will find DDH jokes funny and unproblematic, and thus process the message via ELM's peripheral route. They will be unmotivated to suppress the activated stereotypes. Individuals low in prejudice toward group X, on the other hand, will interpret DDH as a violation of their values. This will lead to effortful processing via ELM's central route, enabling stereotype suppression. In the context of public policy support as a measurement of stereotype application, I propose the following hypothesis:

> *H1a: DDH targeting group X will boost prejudice in evaluating policies concerning group X for participants high in baseline prejudice toward group X. This finding will not hold for those low in baseline prejudice toward group X.*

But MDH adds a layer of irony, leaving interpretation more open to the viewer. Research indicates satiric humor reinforces pre-existing views (Cooks & Orbs, 1993; Ford et al., 2008; LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009; 1993; Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974). In other words, those with higher levels of prejudice toward a given minority will understand MDH as making fun of said minority. Those with lower levels of prejudice will get the irony and understand the joke as mocking prejudice. In both cases, and unlike DDH, both groups will laugh at the joke, albeit for different reasons. As noted above, humor induces positive affect, which in turn is believed to motivate peripheral processing. As such, I propose the following hypothesis:

H1b: MDH will boost prejudice in evaluating policies concerning group X, regardless of baseline prejudice.

I am also interested in the effect of this type of humor on support for policies concerning other minorities. To refresh, spreading activation theory holds that stereotypes are part of a cognitive structure, such that when one stereotype is activated, other stereotypes associated with that group also become active. I propose that activating stereotypes about Group X could activate stereotypes about other groups. This "super spreading activation," whereby activated stereotypes transcend groups, could be driven by ethnocentrism. As defined by Kinder and Kam (2010), ethnocentrism refers to "a way of thinking that partitions the world into in-groups and out-groups – us and them" (230). Authoritarianism – defined as submission to authorities, conventionalism, and aggression toward outgroups – is a concept similar to ethnocentrism (Hetherington & Suhay, 2011; Stenner, 2005). Kinder and Kam (2010) distinguish ethnocentrism from authoritarianism. Although "ethnocentrism serves the authoritarian well [as] out groups… become convenient and safe psychological targets", the authors ultimately argue that ethnocentrism may take root in the personality construct of authoritarianism, but that ethnocentrism has other determinants. Authoritarianism is associated with "opposition to civil liberties and support for aggressive foreign policies" (see Hetherington & Suhay, 2011 for an overview). While ethnocentrism shows a very small correlation with conservatism (Kinder & Kam, 2010), authoritarianism and ethnocentrism are highly correlated. In fact, Altemeyer, the pioneer of authoritarianism research and creator of the Right Wing Authoritarianism

Scale, faced criticism for his original authoritarianism scale being indistinguishable from conservatism (e.g. Ray, 1985). Though Altemeyer (1996) refutes this claim, he concedes a high correlation between authoritarianism and conservatism.

Given the documented negative effects of DDH and MDH's reliance on explicit stereotyping and capacity to be misinterpreted, it seems likely that meta-disparagement jokes—despite their more high-minded intentions—may yield similarly detrimental outcomes. Due to spreading activation of negative attitude structures, attitudes towards other disparaged groups may also be negatively affected. Such outcomes, however, likely depend on viewers' pre-existing attitudes. That is, low levels of baseline prejudice may mitigate the negative effects of MDH. I propose two pairs of hypotheses. First, building on spreading activation theory, I add in the literature on ethnocentrism as I consider the possibility that activating negative attitudes toward gay people could activate negative attitudes towards other groups via super spreading activation as driven by ethnocentrism. It is important to note that to test super spreading activation theory, I am actually testing stereotype application. As in the previous hypotheses, finding evidence of stereotype application implies stereotype activation. Using the same reasoning that motivates H2a and H2b, I thus propose:

> *H2a: DDH targeting group X will boost prejudice in evaluating policies concerning other minorities for participants high in baseline prejudice toward group X. This finding will not hold for those low in baseline prejudice toward group X.*
>
> *H2b: MDH will boost prejudice in evaluating policies concerning other minorities, regardless of baseline prejudice.*

Alternatively, if I see an effect on support of policies concerning other groups, this may be the result of authoritarianism. Given the overlap between ethnocentrism and authoritarianism outlined in the previous section, and the differing correlation with political conservatism, I propose the following hypothesis to determine if authoritarianism or ethnocentrism is being activated. Support for the previous hypotheses and null results here would indicate that ethnocentrism is driving the super spreading activation:

H3a: DDH will boost support for conservative policies.

H3b: MDH will boost support for conservative policies.

Study 1

In the fall of 2010, anti-gay humor garnered national news attention in the wake of several teen suicides resulting from homophobic bullying (Schwartz, 2010). High profile celebrities came under fire for making anti-gay jokes. For example, comedian Tracy Morgan let loose an anti-gay rant during a stand-up show in 2011, intoning that if his son were gay he would, "pull out a knife and stab [him] to death." Morgan eventually issued an apology, stating, "even in a comedy club this clearly went too far and was not funny in any context." (Gonzalez, 2011). The trailer for the film, *The Dilemma,* in which Vince Vaughn jokes, "Electric cars are gay. I mean, not homosexual gay, but my-parents-are-chaperoning-the-dance gay," offers a less a vitriolic display of homophobic humor. While Universal responded to complaints by the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) by releasing a re-edited trailer without the joke, Vaughn defended the bit: "Comedy and joking about our differences breaks tension and

brings us together." GLAAD responded, "This isn't about intent. It's about the fact that no matter what the intent, when 'gay' is used as a pejorative, it sends a message, particularly to youth, that gay taunts are acceptable"(Kilday, 2010). Is GLAAD right? That is, does all anti-gay lead negatively impact perceptions of gay people? Study 1 considers this question by examining the effect of exposure to both direct and ironic homophobic humor on support for gay rights.

Method

 Participants. In exchange for course credit, 53 students (36 female) enrolled in the introductory communications course in the Fall of 2010 and Winter of 2011 participated in exchange for course credit. Of the participants, 60% identified as white, 15% as Asian, 4% as Black, 4% as Native American, and 8% as other races or ethnicities; 8% of participants identified as Latino/a.

 Procedure. In a separate pretesting session, participants first completed a truncated version of Wright, Adams and Bernat's (1999) Homophobia Scale presented as part of larger prescreen that included questions on many different communications topics submitted by several researchers. Several days later, participants either came into a psychology computer lab for an investigation of "media, attitudes, and personality" (fall semester) or completed the experiment online (winter semester). Participants were randomly assigned into one of three conditions: direct homophobic humor that targets gay people (DDH), meta-disparagement humor that targets gay people (MDH), or control (control). All participants viewed and rated the offensiveness, funniness, and perceived intent of four short television clips. Participants then indicated their level of

support for 20 political policies, with four questions regarding gay rights, six questions regarding other minorities, and five questions related to conservatism. Finally, all participants were debriefed.

Materials

Prescreen. The original Homophobia Scale (Wright, Adams, & Bernat, 1999) included 25 questions, which I abbreviated to 5 based on factor loadings and appropriateness. The scale is introduced with the following preamble: "The scale is designed to measure your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors with regard to homosexuality. It is not a test, so there are no right or wrong answers. Indicate your level of agreement with each." Each statement regarding gay people is presented with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (1) to Strongly Disagree (5). See Appendix for question wordings. Scores ranged from 5 (the absolute maximum highest score) to 25 (the absolute minimum score), with a mean of 20.81, in the low end of the scale such that most participants indicated "disagreeing", though not strongly so, with the homophobic statements. Results were also highly skewed to the left (skewness = 1.48), or the lower end of the distribution.

Humor stimuli. Participants were placed into one of three conditions by watching four television clips, two of which were either direct disparagement of gay people (DDH), meta-disparagement of gay people (MDH), or neutral (control). In addition to two neutral comedy clips, numbers 1 and 3 (from *The Simpsons* and *Big Bang Theory*), participants in the DDH condition viewed a stand-up clip from comedian Randy Kagan (clip 2) and *Two and a Half Men* (clip 4), while participants in the MDH condition viewed

a clip from *30 Rock* (clip 2) and *Scrubs* (clip 4). Participants in the control condition

watched two additional neutral clips, from *Saturday Night Live* and *Community*. All clips

were chosen based on length and similarity of source and presentation under the

advisement of both colleagues and research assistants. Brown & Betz (n.d.) used the

same clips in their study, finding the MDH clips (M = 3.65, SD = 1.42) to be perceived as

more ironic that the DDH (M = 2.90, SD = 1.47) (F(1,105) = 5.58, *p* = .02), thus supporting

the choice of clips based on irony.

 Humor ratings. Participants evaluated the funniness and offensiveness of each

clip on a 6-point scale (1 = extremely un-funny/un-offensive, 6 = extremely

funny/offensive), and indicated the perceived target ("Do you think the humor in this

clip targets any individual or group? If yes, whom?"). I created composite variables that

combine the offensiveness and funniness ratings of clips 2 and 4 (the clips that changed

by condition). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates no difference in humor

ratings by condition (F (2, 50) = .53, *p* = .59). An ANOVA reveals a difference of

offensiveness ratings by condition (F (2, 50) = 16.37, *p* = .000). Post-hoc Tukey's tests

indicate significant differences between offensiveness ratings in the DDH condition (*M* =

3.08. *SD* = 1.14) compared to the control (*M* = 1.49. *SD* = .68) (*p* = .000) and the MDH

condition (*M* = 2.45. *SD* = 1.00) compared to the control (*p* = .001), but no significant

difference between the DDH and MDH conditions (*p* = .19).

 Policy support. Participants then rated their level of support for 20 political

policies using a variety of 3 or 5-point Likert scales. Four questions pertained to gay

rights (right to marry, to adopt, and to serve openly in the military, and to have sexual

orientation included as a protected identity in federal hate crime laws (α = .76). For instance, participants responded to "Do you think marriages between same sex couples should or should not be recognized as valid by the law, with the same rights as traditional marriages?" on a scale ranging from 1 = definitely should to 5 = definitely should not. The final gay public policy support variable included the three items with the higher A. Six policy items regarded rights pertaining to other U.S. minorities (α = .51)[7] and five policy items gauged conservatism (α = .49).

Results

I estimate a regression equation to test H1a – participants high in baseline prejudice toward group X exposed to DDH targeting group X will boost prejudice in evaluating policies concerning group X. This finding will not hold for those low in baseline prejudice toward group X – and H1b – MDH will boost prejudice in evaluating policies concerning group X, regardless of baseline prejudice. My model includes a composite measure of support for gay public policy as the dependent variable and a dummy coded variable for the DDH condition (1 if in this condition, 0 if not), a dummy coded variable for the DDH condition (1 if in this condition, 0 if not), prescreen homophobia scores, and interaction terms for each condition dummy variable with prescreen homophobia score.

I find the first level of the model, which includes the condition and prescreen homophobia terms without their interactions, increases the model's explained variance (F(3, 49) = 9.70, p < .001, R^2=.37). The second level, which includes the interaction terms,

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[7] I discuss the low alpha in the conclusion.

does not add significant explained variance and contains no significant interaction terms; as such, I report coefficients and significance levels for level two. Centered pre-screen homophobia is also a significant predictor (B = -.37, p = .000), suggesting that participants with higher levels of baseline homophobia (indicated by lower numbers on the prescreened homophobia scale) demonstrated less support for gay rights. The DDH dummy condition variable is marginally significant (B = -1.26, p = .08), such that those in the direct condition indicated decreased support for gay rights. The MDH condition dummy variable and interaction terms are not significant, though MDH is trending toward having a likewise negative impact. Thus, I find marginal support for H1a but not support for H1b. Figure 5.1 plots the mean support for gay rights by condition to illustrate these effects.

Table 5.1 Gay Rights Regression Analysis (Homophobia)

	B (SE)	p
Constant	12.75 (.60)	.000***
Prescreen	-.37 (.08)	.000**
DDH	-1.43 (.80)	.08
MDH	-.30 (.81)	.73

†p < **.10. ***p < **.05. ****p < **.01. *****p < **.001.**

Figure 5.1 Support for Gay Rights by Condition
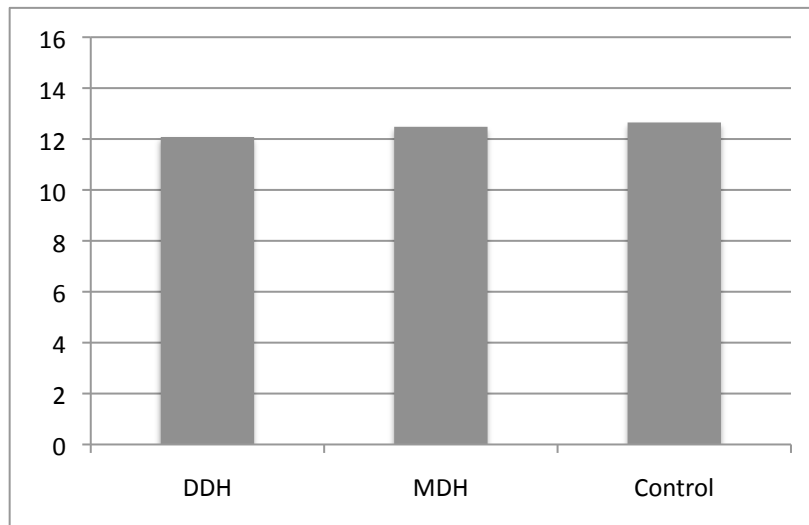
Next, I test hypotheses H2a – DDH targeting group X will boost prejudice in evaluating policies concerning other minorities for participants high in baseline prejudice toward group X. This finding will not hold for those low in baseline prejudice toward group X – and H2b – MDH will boost prejudice in evaluating policies concerning other minorities, regardless of baseline prejudice. I estimate the same regression, changing the dependent variable to support for policies regarding other minorities.

I find the first level of the model, which includes the condition and homophobia terms without their interactions to be significant ($F(2, 49) = 5.36$, $p = .003$, $R^2 =.25$). Adding the second level, which includes the interaction terms, increases the model's explained variance ($F(5, 47) = 6.13$, $p < .001$, $R^2=.40$). Centered pre-screen homophobia is a marginally significant predictor ($B = -.06$, $p = .08$), indicating that those with higher levels of baseline homophobia (indicated by lower numbers on the prescreened homophobia scale) demonstrated less support for other minorities. The DDH condition term and the interaction between the DDH condition and prescreen homophobia are

both non-significant. Though this does not offer statistically significant support for H2a, the trend, as exemplified by Figure 5.2, suggests that the impact of direct humor relative to control is the same for those with low baseline levels of homophobia. For those with higher levels of baseline homophobia, however, exposure to direct homophobic humor is associated with *more* support for other minorities relative to control.

I do find that the MDH condition marginally depresses support for other minorities (*B* = -.38, *p* = .10) compared to the control. The interaction between the MDH condition dummy variable and centered homophobia prescreen is significant (*B* = -.17, *p* < .01), suggesting that low prescreen homophobia diminishes the main effect of the MDH condition by .15 units. In other words, although exposure to meta-homophobic humor makes you less likely to support public policy that protects the rights of other minorities, decreased homophobia attenuates this effect of meta-homophobic humor. These results offer partial support for H2b, as meta-homophobic humor indeed decreases support for other minorities but this is contingent on baseline prejudice, a moderation effect not expected. The effect of MDH on gay rights support is in the expected direction, and the effect is probably not significantly different from the effect on other group attitudes. In other words, the effect of MDH is more or less consistent across groups, but it is not overwhelmingly large. This is important to note because the main effect concerning gay rights is a crucial pre-determinate of evidence of super spreading activation. That is, to have super spreading activation, there must first be spreading activation. These results suggest that MDH spurs super spreading activation but not regular spreading activation.

Table 5.2 Other Minority Rights Regression Analysis (Homophobia)

	B (SE)	p
Constant	3.11 (.16)	.000***
Prescreen	-.06 (.03)	.08†
DDH	-.06 (.21)	.79
MDH	-.38 (.23)	.10
DDH*Prescreen	.01 (.04)	.87
MDH*Prescreen	-.17 (.06)	.005**

Figure 5.2 Other Minority Rights Direct Interaction (Homophobia)
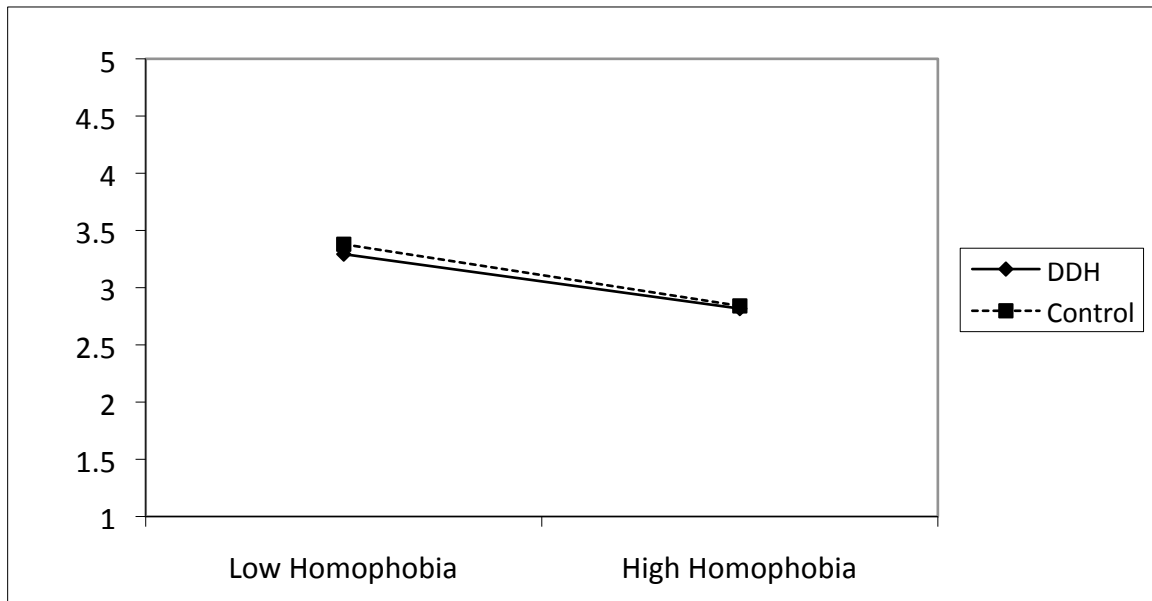
Figure 5.3 Other Minority Rights Meta Interaction (Homophobia)
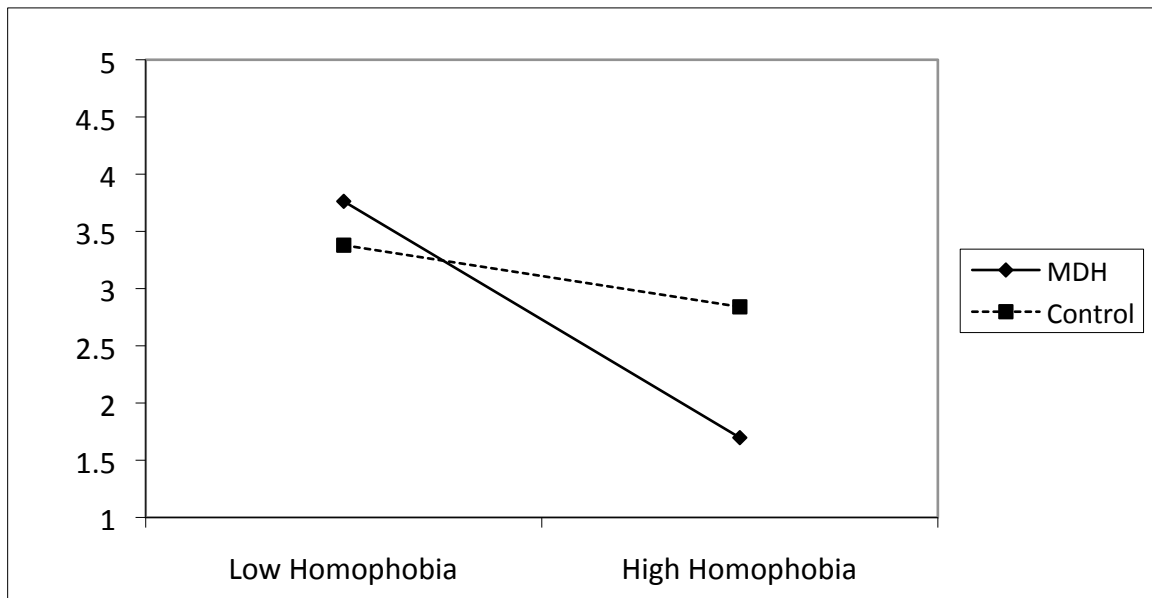
To test H3a – DDH will boost support for conservative policies – and H3b – MDH will boost support for conservative policies – I estimated the same model with a composite conservative policy dependent variable. Although the first level of the model is significant (F(3, 49) = 3.32, p = .03, R^2 = .17) and the second level is marginally significant (F(5, 47) = 2.333, p = .06, R^2 = .20), only centered prescreen homophobia is a significant predictor of conservative ideology. Thus, I do not find support for H3a or H3b, suggesting that ethnocentrism, not conservatism is driving the super spreading activation.

Study 1 Discussion

This study offers surprising, though quite interesting results. Taken together, the results suggest that DDH results in direct homophobic outcomes, as participants demonstrate decreased support for gay rights. MDH, on the other hand, like its indirect style, has indirect effects such that higher prejudice toward other groups results. It seems that GLAAD's assertion, "that no matter what the intent, when 'gay' is used as a pejorative, it sends a message, particularly to youth, that gay taunts are acceptable" is only part of the story. DDH does indeed appear to decrease support for gay rights. MDH, on the other hand, appears to decrease support for other minority rights. In sum, I find that humor has the potential to hurt perceptions of minorities, both directly and indirectly. In the next study, I test whether these effects can be replicated in the contexts of DDH and MDH that target Arabs.

Study 2

Study 2 examines the impact of DDH and MDH leveled at Arabs. In addition to attempting to replicate the results of study 1, the present study also seeks to add to the relatively small literature on explanations of prejudice toward Arab Americans. Arabs in America have encountered waves of discrimination linked to international politics. The September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States may have catalyzed discrimination and violence against Arab Americans (Cainkar, 2008). Despite the fact that just 20 percent of Muslims are Arab – and not all Arabs are Muslim – the two identities are often conflated (Read, 2008; Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008). Stereotypes of both groups include violent tendencies (Alsultany, 2008; Cainkar, 2008; Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008) and backward "social, political, moral, and religious" characteristics (Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008; p. 81). These stereotypes often unify many Americans against an imagined, monolithic enemy (Alsultany, 2008; Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008; Joseph, D'Harlingue, & Wong, 2008). The present study considers the role of DDH and MDH is perpetuating prejudice towards this group.

Method

Participants. The sample includes 61 Americans recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) in June of 2011. As noted earlier, Berinsky, Huber, and Lens (2012) find evidence that Mechanical Turk better represent the American public than university subject pools typically used in experimental research. To maximize participation quality and ensure an American sample, I mandated that all participants live in the U.S. and have a minimum approval rating of 95%. Users participated in

exchange for $1.50. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 67, with a mean age of 34.3 years. 52.5% of the participants were female. 63.9% of participants identified as white, 9.8% as Latino/a, 8.2% as Asian-American, 3.3% as American Indian or Alaskan Native, 1.6% as African-American, and 3.3% as other. The mean political ideology is 3.62 / 7, or in the moderate range.

Procedure

Prescreen. In June 2011, participants took part in an online experiment. To start, participants completed a prejudice prescreen, presented as warm-up questions. Bushman and Bonacci's (2004) Arab American Prejudice scale, adapted under Bushman's guidance from the original 11 questions down to 6 based on factor loadings, established baseline anti-Arab sentiment. Brown & Youmans (2012) find the reliability of the truncated scale to be comparable to that of the original scale. The scale was presented after a sexism scale and before a homophobia scale (M = 16.58 / 25, SD = 4.45). Participants then rated their familiarity with all of the comedians and series used in all conditions on a 3-point scale ranging from "not at all familiar" to "very familiar." Then, they reported their political ideology on a 7-point scale.

Humor stimuli. Participants were randomized again into one of three conditions: direct anti-Arab humor (DDH), meta-anti-Arab humor (MDH), or control humor. Participants in all conditions watched four clips. Clips 2 and 4 were filler comedy clips from *The Simpsons* and *Big Bang Theory* and were consistent across all conditions. Clips 1 and 3 varied by condition. Those in the DDH condition watched stand-up bit from Jim Norton and Jeff Dunham. Participants in the MDH condition watched a clip from *Colbert*

Report and *The Office*. Those in the control watched more filler clips, this time from *Saturday Night Live* and *Community*.

Humor ratings. Participants evaluated the funniness and offensiveness of each clip on a 6-point scale (1 = extremely un-funny/un-offensive, 6 = extremely funny/offensive), and indicate the perceived target ("Do you think the humor in this clip targets any individual or group? If yes, whom?). I created composite variables that combine the offensiveness and funniness ratings of clips 2 and 4 (the clips that changed by condition). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates no difference in humor ratings by condition (F(2, 58) = .36, p = .70). Another ANOVA reveals a difference of offensiveness ratings by condition (F(2, 58) = 9.56, p < .01). Post-hoc Tukey's tests indicate significant differences between offensiveness ratings in the DDH condition (M = 4.73, SD = 2.29) compared to the control (p = .003) and the MDH (M = 5.22, SD = 2.37) compared to the control (M = 2.62, SD = 1.20) (p < .001), but no significant difference between the DDH and MDH conditions (p = .72).

Policy support. Participants then indicated their level of support for 20 political policies using a variety of 3, 4, or 5-point Likert scales. Four questions tapped attitudes toward Arab Americans (attitudes toward closing Guantanamo Bay, hijab banning, airport security profiling, mosque at ground zero). For instance, participants were asked "Do you think the US should adopt a policy that forbids female students from wearing hijabs (traditional Muslim headscarves) to school?" on a scale ranging from 1 = definitely yes to 5 = definitely not (α = .71). It is important to note that these measures conflate Arab and Muslim identities. While just 20% of Muslims are Arab, this conflation aligns

with American prejudices (Brown & Youmans, 2012; Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008; Read, 2008). Four policy items regarded rights pertaining to other U.S. minorities (α = .20)[8] and six policy items gauged conservatism (α = .71). The low reliability on the other minority composite may influence the outcome. Finally, participants answered demographic questions and were debriefed.

Results

I estimate a regression equation To test H1a – DDH targeting group X will boost prejudice in evaluating policies concerning group X for participants high in baseline prejudice toward group X. This finding will not hold for those low in baseline prejudice toward group X – and H1b – MDH will boost prejudice in evaluating policies concerning other minorities, regardless of baseline prejudice. My model includes a composite measure of support for Arab Americans as the dependent variable and a dummy coded variable for the DDH condition (1 if in this condition, 0 if not), a dummy coded variable for the MDH condition (1 if in this condition, 0 if not), prescreen Arab prejudice scores, and interaction terms for each condition dummy variable with prescreen homophobia score.

I find the first level of the model, which includes prescreen Arab prejudice and the dummy coded clip condition variables, to be significant ($F(3, 56)$ = 13.87, $p < .001$, R^2=.43). Adding the second level, which includes the interactions, does add significant explained variance and contains no significant interaction terms ($F(5, 54)$ = 8.63, $p < .001$, R^2= .44). As such, I report coefficients and significance levels for level 1. The MDH

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[8] I discuss the low alpha in the discussion.

condition depresses support for gay rights (B = -2.37, p = .02) compared to the control.

Centered prescreen Arab prejudice is also a significant predictor (B = -2.83, p < .001),

suggesting that participants with higher levels of Arab prejudice demonstrate less

support for Arabs. The DDH condition dummy variable, though trending to have a

negative impact on support for Arabs and interaction terms are not significant. Thus, I

find support for H1b, whereby MDH decreases support for Arabs, a finding not

contingent on baseline prejudice. I do not find support for H2a.

Table 5.3 Arab Rights Regression Analysis (anti-Arab)

	B (SE)	p
Constant	32.80 (2.97)	.000***
Prescreen	-2.83 (.09)	.000**
DDH	-.84 (.96)	.39
MDH	-2.37 (1.01)	.02*

†p < .**10.** *p < .**05.** **p < .**01.** ***p < .**001.**

Figure 5.4 Support for Arab Rights by Condition
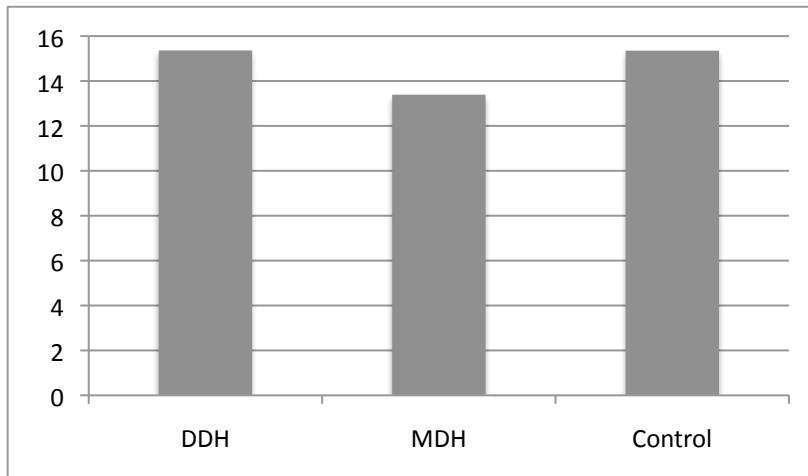
Next, I test hypotheses H2a – DDH targeting group X will boost prejudice in

evaluating policies concerning other minorities for participants high in baseline

prejudice toward group X. This finding will not hold for those low in baseline prejudice

toward group X – and H2b – MDH will boost prejudice in evaluating policies concerning other minorities, regardless of baseline prejudice. To do so, I estimate the same regression, changing the dependent variable to support for other minorities policies.

I find the first level of the model, which includes centered prescreen Arab prejudice and condition dummy variables, to be significant ($F(3, 57) = 3.97$ $p = .01$, $R^2=.17$). Adding the second level, which includes the interactions, further increases the model's predictive power ($F(5, 55) = 4.09$, $p < .01$, $R^2=.27$). The DDH condition term and the MDH condition term are non-significant; thus, I do not find support for H2a. The interaction between the direct condition dummy variable and centered Arab prejudice prescreen is significant ($B = .52$, $p = .03$). Graphing this interaction term reveals that those low in Arab prejudice showed decreased support for other minority rights when exposed DDH relative to control, while those high in Arab prejudice demonstrate elevated support for other minorities when exposed to DDH relative to control. This counters H2a. The surprising nature of this result will be considered in the discussion. The interaction between the dummy meta variable and prescreen Arab prejudice is non-significant, offering no support forH3b.

Table 5.4 Other Minority Rights Regression Analysis (anti-Arab)

	B (SE)	p
Constant	3.95 (.94)	.000***
Prescreen	-.13 (.15)	.40
DDH	.13 (.19)	.51
MDH	-.24 (.20)	.24
DDH*Prescreen	.52 (.23)	.03*
MDH*Prescreen	-.08 (.23)	.73

†p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Figure 5.5 Other Minority Rights Direct Interaction (Anti-Arab)

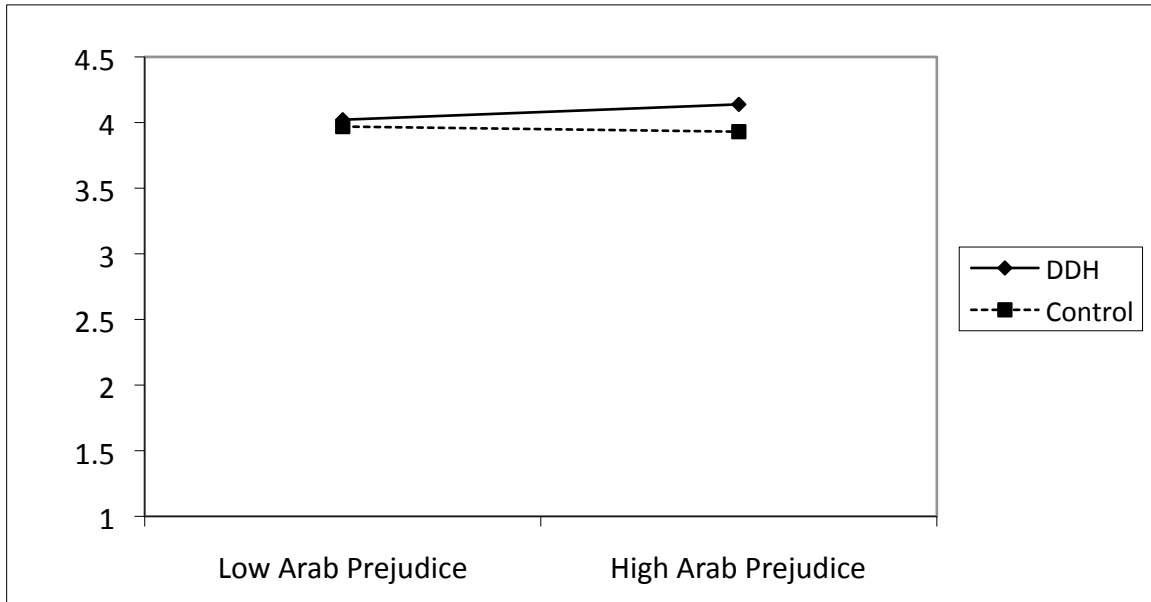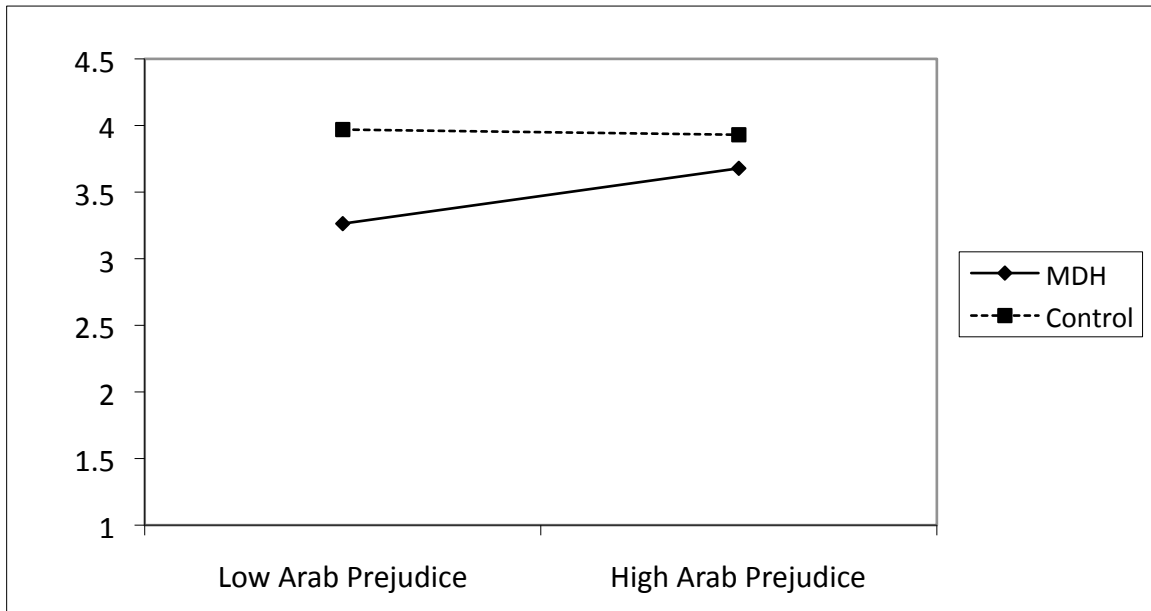
Figure 5.6 Other Minority Rights Meta Interaction (Anti-Arab)

I estimate the same model with a composite conservative policy dependent variable to test H3a – DDH will boost support for conservative policies – and H3b – MDH will boost support for conservative policies. While the first level of the model is marginally significant, neither the second level of the model nor any of the condition

terms is significant. Thus, I do not find support for H3a or H3b, suggesting that ethnocentrism, not conservatism, is driving the super spreading activation.

Study 2 Discussion

Study 2 offers results that complement, though do not in fact match, the findings vis-à-vis homophobic humor. I find that those who viewed MDH targeting Arabs humor demonstrated decreased support for Arabs, but this is not contingent on baseline prejudice. This matches the trends of the homophobic humor study, though that effect was nonsignigifcant. In terms of other minority rights, I find the opposite backdoor effect of the homophobic humor study, whereby the effect of DDH on support for other minorities (immigrants, Arab or Muslim-Americans, and Black Americans) depends on baseline Arab prejudice. Specifically, those high in Arab prejudice showed more support for other minority rights when exposed direct anti-Arab humor relative to control. This runs opposite to my predictions. This is a very surprising result and may be speak to the vitriolic nature of the clips selected. Yet, all clips were rated as equally funny and DDH was rated as equally offensive compared to the MDH clip, with both DDH and MDH being more offensive than the control. Thus, I am not sure why this interaction emerges in the opposite expected direction. Further, there was no main effect of DDH in this model, only an interaction term. But, because I mostly concerned with meta-disparagement humor, I move on. The interaction between MDH and baseline Arab prejudice is non-significant here but, when graphed, maps onto the findings of the homophobia study. That I did not find evidence that conservative ideology was also activated suggests the super spreading activation takes root in ethnocentrism as

opposed to authoritarianism. The results of the two stories presented in this chapter complement each other and warrant further discussion of their joint implications.

Conclusion

The results of the (meta-)homophobic humor and (meta-)anti-Arab studies offer complementary support for the other hypotheses such that I find at least partial support for all hypotheses.

Both studies measured stereotype application in a public opinion context. The first set of hypotheses pertained to the effect of direct disparagement humor (DDH) and meta-disparagement humor (MDH) on support for policies pertaining to the group targeted by the humor. Specifically, I predicted that DDH would boost prejudice in evaluating policies concerning group X only for participants high in baseline prejudice toward group X, while DDH would have no effect on those low in prejudice toward group X. In Study 1, I find that those who viewed DDH targeting gay people were less likely to support gay rights. While pre-screen homophobia level was a significant predictor of support for gay rights public policy, this variable did not interact with clip condition. Specifically, while direct homophobic humor decreases support for gays rights, this is not contingent on baseline prejudice as predicted. This offers partial support for this H1a. In study 2, the direction of the effect of DDH was in the same direction but was non-significant. Taken together, though, these results suggest that DDH boosts prejudicial evaluations of policies concerning the targeted group.

Contrary to prediction, the interaction terms were not significant, suggesting baseline prejudice does not moderate the effect of DDH. Although previous work found

that levels of sexism moderated reactions to sexist humor, it is possible that qualitative differences between homophobic / anti-Arab and sexist attitudes (e.g., the acceptability of expressing them) make anti-gay and anti-Arab humor more influential across participants with a variety of attitudes. Alternatively, the non-significant interaction terms may be due to the generally low and skewed baseline levels of homophobia and Arab prejudice in the sample. Future studies could study the impact of this type of humor on individuals with more varied levels of baseline homophobia. Using the same clips and basic methodology, Brown & Betz (n.d.) find a similar, significant negative main effect of anti-gay humor on support for gay public policy. Including a measure of irony, they also find that this relationship is mediated by empathy such that depressed empathy for gay people, as invoked by direct homophobic humor, mediates this effect. Perhaps the comedic delivery of this direct disparagement induces peripheral processing in all participants, such that even those participants lower in homophobia felt unable or unwilling to engage in critical processing. Long-term exposure to this type of humor could have detrimental effects on civil rights.

H1b predicted that MDH would boost prejudice in evaluating policies concerning group X, regardless of baseline prejudice. In study 1, I find no effect of MDH on support for gay rights. Though the coefficient is in the expected direction, it is highly non-significant ($p = .73$). In Study 2, I find that MDH targeting Arabs decreases support for Arabs, regardless of baseline prejudice, which offers support for this hypothesis. That I did not find effects in Study 1 could be an issue of power. Additionally, gay rights may have more normative support than policies concerning Arabs. Explicit measures of

support for gay rights may allow for effortful correction in a short-term context. It is therefore possible that stereotype activation may be salient and/or this type of humor may carry long-term effects, in both cases. Future studies could therefore consider other outcomes that may be less amenable to effortful controlling of anti-gay responses (e.g., quick person rating tasks). Additionally, a longitudinal analysis could incorporate potential effects of long-term viewing of this type of humor.

This chapter also introduces and tests "super spreading activation theory." H2a predicted that DDH targeting group X would boost prejudice in evaluating policies concerning other minorities for participants high, but not low, in baseline prejudice toward group X. MDH, on the other hand, was posited to boost prejudice in evaluating policies concerning other minorities, regardless of baseline prejudice (H2b). Study 1 offers support for H2b. While I did not find a significant effect of meta-disparagement humor on support for gay rights, I do, however, find marginally significant evidence that the meta-disparagement condition depresses support for other minorities. Specifically, participants who watched MDH targeting gays humor indicated less support for policies supporting these other minorities. This main effect is attenuated by lower levels of baseline homophobia, a finding not predicted. This suggests a backdoor effect, whereby purportedly progressive MDH may not be detrimental to the group it ironically targets, but may invoke prejudice toward other groups. While I can only speculate on why this happens, it seems possible that the effort required to suppress prejudice toward gay people inhibits the ability to keep other socially unacceptable attitudes in check. Further, while participants were explicitly aware of the gay stereotypes invoked, the proposed

super spreading activation moved beyond gays to other groups. Lack of awareness of this likely activation makes it more difficult to monitor one's prejudice. In Study 2, the same trend emerges vis-à-vis MDH but is not significant. This is likely an issue of power given the relatively small sample size. I find the opposite backdoor effect of the homophobic humor study. DDH decreases support for other minority rights differently based on prejudice. But, those low in Arab prejudice demonstrate lower support for other minorities relative to control. This is an unexpected result. It is important to note, however, that there was no main effect of DDH in this model. It is important to note that the alpha for the other minority rights variable was moderate in Study 1 (.51) and low in Study 2 (.2). In Study 2, the related finding was driven by support for immigration included in this outcome variable. In Study 1, Arab rights were included in the measure, which maps onto the type of prejudice captured by immigration support: xenophobia. Future studies should measure and then construct other minority rights variables that speak to xenophobia on the one had and other prejudices on the other hand, both of which are conflated here due to limited policy questions pertaining to other minority rights. This would help clarify the type of super spreading activation occurring.

In both studies, I did not find evidence that conservative ideology was also activated. This suggests the super spreading activation takes root in ethnocentrism as opposed to authoritarianism. This set of findings is novel and thus replication, both in the current context and using other groups as the explicit humor target, is necessary. Thus, perhaps super-spreading activation is *not* predicated on regular spreading activation as originally assumed. A future study could not only test super spreading

activation theory by measuring stereotype application vis-à-vis other minorities, but also stereotype activation. This more direct test could be achieved with an Implicit Attitude Test (IAT) or Lexical Decision Task (LDT), as in the previous chapter. As in the sexist humor study, it is also important to note that the control condition humor did not invoke minorities explicitly, either gay individuals or Arabs. Thus, results could be attributable to a simple priming effect.

Though complementary, the results of the two studies do not match each other. It is important to note that gay people and Arabs have different histories of discrimination, levels of current prejudice, and sets of associated stereotypes. Thus, it is understandable that the humor leveled at each group and its effects on attitudes towards these groups and minorities are different. Further, the stereotypes associated with each group and, thus, the relevant policies have to do with social fear in the case of homophobia and political or public safety fear in the case of anti-Arab prejudice. Perhaps the different levels and types of perceived threat contribute to the disparate results. That is, the stereotypes associated with gay individuals take root in social difference. There is no physical safety threat involved. The stereotypes associated with Arabs, on the other hand, equate this group with terrorists. The threat of Arabs thus becomes one of physical safety and national security. Future studies could consider a stereotype activation outcome to test both spreading activation theory and super spreading activation theory. Nonetheless, when taken together, these studies suggest disparagement humor in general and meta-disparagement in particular may be dangerous.

Chapter 6 – Measuring the Impact of Meta-Racist Humor Delivered by a White Versus

Black Comedian on Stereotype Application

On *The Colbert Report,* host Stephen Colbert assumes a right wing pundit persona to undermine, via ironic ridicule, conservative talking heads. In one bit, Colbert proposes that whites seeking to support a conservative agenda can find blacks who disagree with Obama by painting other whites with shoe polish: "It's the traditional way for racists to show they have nothing against black people… So, tea partiers, Birthers, Glenn, Rush, don't let your valid criticisms be unfairly associated with racism. Before the next time you accuse the president of having a secret plan to take white people's money and give it to black people, or broadcast shocking and jive imitations of African American leaders, just put on a little black washing, then people will hear your real message." Colbert's true message is that such acts, and anyone who would engage in them, are racist. But does the message get through?

Since Colbert is white, might the irony of his message get lost on most viewers? One way to explore this question is to compare the impact of Colbert's meta-racist humor with that of black comedians, like *The Daily Show*'s Larry Wilmore. Wilmore also takes on black face when he highlights Robert Downey Jr.'s Oscar nomination for comically donning black face in *Tropic Thunder*, an example included in Chapter 2's textual analysis. Given the Academy Awards' tendency to reward actors for playing the disabled, Wilmore asks, "What are we, the new retarded?" Explicitly racist, as he links

black identity to the mentally challenged, Wilmore's true message is to highlight the racism of the role and the awards. Wilmore's race also affords him in-group status, which may enable the ironic message of this humor to be understood. This chapter considers whether the identity of the comedian as in- or out- group member changes the effect of this type of humor on audience prejudice.

The textual analysis presented in chapter 2 finds meta-disparagement humor that targets blacks to be the most successful in making prejudice, not the minority, the clear target. Specifically, meta-racist humor hyperbolizes black stereotypes to ridicule racial stereotyping. The take home message of this type of humor is that post-racialism is an illusion. The content analysis presented in Chapter 3 finds that blacks are the targets of meta-disparagement humor 15.27% of the time and non-meta-disparagement humor 6.36% of the time. This is the largest ratio of meta- to non-meta of the four groups. Further, the survey results presented in Chapter 3 show that, of the four groups, it is considered *least* acceptable to make fun of African Americans.

Taken together, these results suggest that un-ironic racial humor is rarer and more contentious vis-à-vis ironic humor than for the other three groups. Thus, where the three experiments presented thus far compare meta-disparagement to direct disparagement, here, I consider only meta-racist humor. This offers the opportunity to test the additional, important hypothesis of *who* can deliver meta-disparagement humor effectively. In meta-racist humor, a comedian's race may moderate humor's impact. To that end, the present chapter investigates the effects of meta-racist humor delivered by a white versus black comedian on levels of racism, beliefs about the

prevalence of racism, and evaluation of white versus black political candidates in two experiments.

Hypotheses

Both experiments utilize three humor conditions: out-group meta-racist humor from a white comedian (OMRH), in-group meta-racist humor from a black comedian (IMRH), and non-disparagement humor (control). The present chapter draws from the literature used thus far, namely the potential for meta-disparagement humor to affect individuals both high and low in prejudice, albeit for different reasons. As previously noted, research suggests that individuals interpret humor in line with their worldviews (Cooks & Orbs, 1993; Ford et al., 2008; LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009; 1993; Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974). But the irony in meta-disparagement invites prejudiced individuals to laugh at the explicit message and individuals low in prejudice to laugh at the implicit message. Humor induces positive affect, which sets the stage for non-critical processing according to Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Baumgartner & Morris, 2008; Bless & Fiedler, 1995; Ford & Ferguson, 2004; Martin, 2007; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010; Young, 2008; Zhang, 1996). Further, according to spreading activation theory, when one stereotype about a given group is activated, other stereotypes about that group also become activated (Berinsky & Mendelberg, 2005; Mendelberg, 1997; Stephan & Stephan, 1993; Valentino, 1999; Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002).

Taken together, this suggests that individuals high *and* low in racism will laugh at meta-racist humor for different reasons. Racially conservative people may read validation of making fun of black people; racially progressive people may hold a norm of

laughing at prejudice. The resulting mirth will facilitate peripheral processing, setting the stage for spreading activation. As the present chapter uses clips from *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, I now relate these general trends to these specific outlets. *The Daily Show*'s audience is more popular with viewers aged 18 to 29 compared to more traditional late night comedy programs like *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* and *The Late Show with David Letterman* (Young, 2004). Similarly, Colbert's viewers tend to be "young, white, educated" (Green, 2008). Further, both series' audiences contain twice as many liberals as the population at large (Easley, 2009). Regular viewers may thus interpret Colbert and Wilmore's meta-racist jokes as support for their own liberal opinions. Individuals high in prejudice, in contrast, may interpret the jokes as straightforwardly racist. Further, they may find that layer of the joke just as funny (Ford & Ferguson, 2004; Greenwood & Isbell, 2002; Hobden & Olson, 1994) as low-racist viewers find the meta-racist joke. To this end, Baumgartner and Morris (2008) find that watching *The Colbert Report*'s deadpan mocking of conservatives increases affinity for conservative politics, regardless of baseline ideology. Like Baumgartner and Morris (2008), and the previous chapters, the present studies explore stereotype application, or the use of stereotypes in judgments of a group or group member, thus assuming stereotype activation (Kunda & Spencer, 2003). I thus propose the following hypothesis concerning out-group meta-racist humor (OMRH) and in-group meta-racist humor (IMRH) alike:

> *H1: Both OMRH and IMRH will boost prejudice, as measured by higher scores on*
>
> *the Symbolic Racism scale and lower perceptions of discrimination (Study 1) and*

more negative and stereotypical evaluations of a black versus white political

candidate (Study 2).

This chapter adds to this literature and the chapters presented thus far to consider comedian group status. Making fun of one's own group is seen as less offensive than disparaging an out-group (for a review, see Ford & Ferguson, 2004), and the more acceptable the humor seems, the more likely it is to be interpreted non-critically and thus influence the audience (e.g., Ford, Johnson, Blevins, & Zepeda, 1999). The humor of meta-disparagement's implicit target can be summoned through the joke's content (e.g., exaggerating stereotypes); the joke-teller's delivery (e.g., tone of voice, facial expression, body language); and /or background information about the political or social views of the joke-teller. Thus, source attributes, such as comedian in-group or out-group status, may also play a role in the successful conveyance of meta-disparagement humor. This theme emerged in focus groups discussing *In Living Color*. Compared to other shows dabbling in satire, e.g. *Saturday Night Live, In Living Color*'s parodies of black stereotypes seemed "riskier" because its creator was black, as was most of its cast (Cooks & Orbs, 1993). Focus group participants worried that the images would be taken literally because they came from a black source. Chappelle's concerns about the interpretation of his racial comedy on *Chappelle's Show* support this notion. The joke teller's race is thus key to the perception of humor in disparagement (Ford & Ferguson, 2004).

Although source cues can facilitate the correct interpretation of meta-racist humor, it can still be difficult for some audience member to grasp a joke's implicit target.

Successful meta-disparagement must be understood as ironic both in the moment of encoding (by the joke teller and other producers) and decoding (by the audience). In other words, regardless of comedian intentions, pre-existing audience attitudes may help determine meta-disparagement humor's interpretation and impact. The comedian's group membership may provide different cues about the message behind the humor and the norm it challenges or endorses. Meta-racist humor by a white comedian may be more difficult to identify as satire, and therefore more likely to be interpreted as direct disparagement. In-group meta-racist humor by a black comedian, on the other hand, may be easier to identify as ironic, as the joke teller's race offers a visual counter to the explicit message. Thus, I propose the following hypothesis:

H2: The effects predicted by H1 will be more pronounced for OMRH than IMRH.

Study 1

Method

Participants. One hundred individuals participated in exchange for course credit for introduction to communications (31 Ps) or introduction to psychology (69 Ps) courses. Of the 100 total participants, 75 were female. Eighty-five identified as white, 9 as black, 2 as Asian, and 4 as "other." Participant ages ranged from 17 to 20 (*M* = 18.36), and self-reported an average political ideology of 3.51 on a 7-point scale, or moderate to somewhat liberal.

Procedure. To establish baseline levels of racism, participants first completed the Symbolic Racism Scale as part of a mandatory prescreen for both the communications and psychology pools. Several days later, participants from the

communications pool completed the experiment online, pitched as an investigation of attitudes about politics and opinions on the media. Participants from the psychology subject pool came into a psychology computer lab for the experiment, with the same cover story.

Participants were then randomized into one of three humor clip conditions: meta-racism humor from white comedian Stephen Colbert (OMRH), meta-racist humor from black comedian Larry Wilmore (IMRH), or control humor (a clip that did not implicate race or related themes). Participants watched and rated the clips, then completed the racist attitudes outcome measures. Finally, all participants answered basic demographic questions, including political ideology, and were debriefed.

Materials

Prescreen. The Symbolic Racism Scale asks participants to use a three- or four-point scale to indicate their agreement with eight statements measuring racist attitudes (e.g., "Over the past few years, blacks have gotten more economically than they deserve", $\alpha = .73$). The scale also addresses the social desirability issues associated with self-report measures of racism by capturing racism in its current, more socially acceptable form. That is, replacing "old-fashioned racism's" overt racism rooted in white superiority, symbolic racism attempts to explain racism in the post-Civil Rights era by contending that blacks do not deserve and over-demand government support (Devine, 1995; Feldman & Huddy, 2005; Hutchings & Valentino, 2004). Thus, racial resentment is said to derive from a combination of anti-black sentiment and conservative values,

particularly limited government and individualism (Kinder, 1996; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Sears & Henry, 2003). Scores ranged from 0.04 to .83 (M = .40, SD = .15).

Humor stimuli. All participants viewed three short television clips. In addition to two neutral comedy clips (from *The Simpsons* and *Big Bang Theory*), participants in the black comedian condition viewed a clip with Larry Wilmore lampooning race on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, while participants in the white comedian condition viewed a clip of Stephen Colbert doing the same on *Colbert Report*. Both meta-racist clips were chosen based on similarity of length, source, presentation, and topic (Barack Obama). Participants in the control condition watched a third neutral clip from *Saturday Night Live*. Details about each clip can be found in the Appendix. Participants rated each clip, then completed the Symbolic Racism Scale and perceptions of discrimination scale, and finally provided demographic information, before being debriefed.

Humor ratings. After each clip, participants used a 6-point Likert scale to rate how enjoyable, funny, and offensive they found it to be (ranging from "extremely" to "not at all"), and a 3-point scale to report how familiar they were with the show (ranging from "not at all familiar" to "very familiar"). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) reveals that all three humor conditions were rated as equally humorous (F(2, 86) = 1.54, p = .22, d = .38). In terms of offensiveness, an ANOVA reveals a significant effect of humor condition (F(2, 85) = 31.60, p < .001). The OMRH (M = 4.28, SD = 1.46, p < .001) was rated as more offensive than the control (M = 1.86, SD = .93) (F(1, 85) = 59.32, p < .001). Likewise, IMRH (M = 3.41, SD = 1.28 p < .001) was rated as more offensive than the control (F(1, 85) = 25.32, p < .001) were rated as more offensive than the control clip.

Participants also rated the white comedian as significantly more offensive than the black comedian ($F(1, 85) = 6.78$, $p = .01$).

Participants also provided written responses to the following question, "Do you think this clip makes fun of anyone? If so, whom?" Answers to this question were coded to assess participants' perceptions of racist versus meta-racist intentions in the humor. Two coders blind to experimental procedures analyzed participants' open-ended responses regarding the target of the clips' humor as a measure of meta-disparagement comprehension. Specifically, participants who wrote that the humor targeted racism, stereotypes, racist people, etc., or who mentioned that the piece was intended as satire were coded as comprehending the irony inherent to meta-disparagement. All other responses were coded as not comprehending the true joke target, resulting in a dichotomous meta-disparagement comprehension category. The coders agreed on 91% of a subset of cases, resolved discrepancies through discussion, and split the remaining cases to be coded independently. A Fisher's Exact Test[9] test reveals a significant effect of humor condition on meta-disparagement comprehension ($p < .01$). Separate analyses that OMRH (six of 27 saw the clip as satiric; $p < .01$, FET) and IMRH (seven of 26 saw the clip as satiric; $p < .01$, FET) were each significantly more likely to be recognized as meta-disparagement than the control (0 of 35 saw the clips as satiric). There were no differences between OMRH and IMRH ($\chi^2(1, N = 53) = .04$, $p = .69$), suggesting equivalent perceptions of meta-racist intent.

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[9] Because the predicted cell count two of the cells was less than 5, I use Fisher's Exact Test. The OMRH / IMRH comparison is χ^2 because it cell size requirements are met.

Racist attitudes and beliefs about racism. Participants answered the Symbolic Racism Scale (α = .82) again at post-test. Then, they completed the Beliefs about Prevalence of Discrimination Scale (Swim & Miller, 1999), which gauged their perceptions of the prevalence of race-based discrimination in the US. Specifically, they indicated how often they believe blacks in the United States experience each of seven types of discrimination (in the classroom, in the workforce, from police, from fellow white employees, from teaching assistants and faculty, in the form of staring by White people, and in the form of racial slurs) on a 5-point scale (0 – "never" and 4 – "very frequently"; α = .88).

Results

Symbolic Racism. I estimate a model with post-manipulation Symbolic Racism scores as the dependent variable. The first level of the model includes centered pre-screen Symbolic Racism and is significant. The second level of the model includes the OMRH dummy and IMRH dummy variables. The third level of the model includes interaction terms between centered pre-screen symbolic racism and the dummy variables. While the model is significant, none of the terms of interest demonstrate predictive power. Thus, exposure to a brief clip containing meta-racist humor did not directly affect Symbolic Racism scores. I do not find support for H1 or H2. This is a most conservative test, since Symbolic Racism is a stable predisposition. Perhaps we would not expect such a firm underlying predisposition to change in response to a single brief exposure.

Perceptions of discrimination. Next I estimate the impact of source cues on perceptions of discrimination. I estimate the same model, changing the dependent variable to the perceptions of discrimination scores. The third level of the model, which includes centered prescreen Symbolic Racism, the dummy coded clip conditions, and their interactions is modestly significant ($F(5,84) = 6.86$, $p < .001$; $R^2 = .29$). Centered prescreen Symbolic Racism is a significant predictor ($B = -2.23$, $p = .02$), meaning that higher levels of baseline racism are associated with lower perceptions of discriminations against blacks. OMRH is marginally significant ($B = .28$, $p = .09$), indicating that watching a white comedian make meta-racist jokes *increases* perceptions of discrimination. This counters H2, such that IMRH has a more *positive* impact, i.e. participants recognize racism as socially salient, than IMRH. Further, IMRH does not appear to influence perceptions of discrimination, thus offering no support for H1. An interaction between OMRH and baseline racism is also in the expected direction but is non-significant ($B = -2.63$, $p = .19$), suggesting that higher levels of baseline racism may attenuate this main effect.

Table 6.1 Perceptions of Discrimination

	B (SE)	p
Constant	4.03 (.11)	.000***
Prescreen	-2.23 (.91)	.02*
IMRH	.04 (.16)	.80
OMRH	.28 (.16)	.09†
IMRH*Prescreen	.43 (1.22)	.72
OMRH*Prescreen	-1.63 (1.23)	.19

†p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Study 2

Where Study 1 considers the effect of in-group versus out-group meta-racist humor on attitudes, as measured by Symbolic Racism and perceptions of the prevalence of discrimination, Study 2 adds real world applicability. Specifically, this study considers the effect of in-group versus out-group meta-racist humor on evaluations and intention to vote for a black versus white political candidate.

Method

Participants. The sample includes 113 participants who took part in exchange for course credit for introduction to communications (53 Ps) or psychology (60 Ps) courses. Eighty-three participants were female. Eight-one identified as white, 4 as black, 4 as Asian, 2 as mixed race, and 3 selected the "other" category. Ages ranged from 17 to 21 (M = 18.46), and the main self-reported political affiliation was 3.65 on 7-point scale, or in the moderate range.

Procedure. As in Study 1, participants first completed the Symbolic Racism Scale to establish baseline prejudice as part of a mandatory prescreen for both the communications and psychology pools. Several days later, participants from the communications pool completed the experiment online, presented as an investigation of media, attitudes, and personality. Participants from the psychology subject pool came into a psychology computer lab for the experiment with the same description. Participants were then randomized into one of same three conditions utilized in study 1 (IMRH, OMRH, or control). After viewing the clips, participants were randomized to see either a white or black candidate with a brief description. They then answered questions

about the candidate. Finally, participants provided basic demographic information and were fully debriefed.

Materials

Humor Stimuli. The humor stimuli were identical to those used in Study 1. The procedure was also identical, save for the outcome measures. A one-way ANOVA reveals a significant effect of humor condition on perceived clip funniness ($F(2,107)$ = 5.40, $p < .01$). Post-hoc Tukey's tests reveal a significant difference between OMRH (M = 3.61 SD = 1.36) and IMRH (M = 4.58 SD = .93) ($p < .01$). There were no significant differences between OMRH or IMRH and control (M = 1.08 SD = 1.34). A one-way ANOVA reveals a significant effect of condition on perceived offensiveness of the target clip ($F(2,106)$ = 19.35, $p < .001$). As in Study 1, post-hoc Tukey's tests reveal OMRH (M = 3.77 SD = 1.48) was rated as more offensive than the control (M = 3.88 SD = 1.13) ($p < .001$). And again, IMRH (M = 3.38 SD = 1.29) was rated as more offensive than the control ($p < .001$). Unlike Study 1, however, participants rated OMRH and IMRH as equally offensive (p = .40). The potential implications of these differences will be discussed in the conclusion of this chapter.

A Fisher's Exact Test[10] test reveals a significant effect of humor condition on meta-disparagement comprehension ($p < .02$). Separate analyses reveal that OMRH (eight of 45 saw the clip as satiric; $p < .01$, FET) and IMRH (five of 40 saw the clip as satiric; p = .05, FET) were each significantly more likely to be recognized as meta-

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[10] As in Study 1, because the predicted cell count for the control condition was less than 0, I use Fisher's Exact Text. The OMRH / IMRH comparison is χ^2 because it cell size requirements are met.

disparagement than the control (zero of 31 saw the clip as satiric). There were no differences between OMRH and IMRH (χ^2(1, N = 75) = 1.40, p = .24), suggesting equivalent perceptions of meta-racist intent. These irony comprehension results replicate the findings of Study 1.

Candidate ratings. Participants viewed a description for a candidate running for mayor, presented with either a photograph of a black or white man, and a brief description of the candidate's political initiatives. Designed to be ambiguously moderate, the initiatives included support for education and a tough-on-crime stance. Photographs of the black and white candidates were pre-tested to ensure comparable levels of attractiveness (F(1, 30) = 1.31, p = .26), intelligence (F(1, 30) = .01, p = .91), and fun-ness (F(1, 29) = .15, p = .70). No results were significant regarding these measures thus they are not included in the analyses.

Participants indicated their warmth towards the candidate (from 0 to 100), likelihood of voting for the candidate (7-point scale, ranging from "very unlikely" to "very likely"), political leanings of the candidate (7-point scale, from "very liberal" to "very conservative"), agreement with the candidate's policies (7-point scale, including 1 – "very much," 4 – "somewhat," and 7 – "not at all"), and whether or not they think the candidate will win the election ("yes" or "no"). Participants then used a 7-point scale (1 – "not at all," 7 – "very") to rate the applicant on the following racially stereotyped traits: honest, hardworking, intelligent, aggressive, and competent.

Results

Candidate evaluation. I created a composite variable of candidate trait ratings. I then estimated a model for those who saw the black candidate with the composite trait score as the dependent variable. The first level of the model includes centered pre-screen Symbolic Racism; the second level of the model includes the OMRH dummy and IMRH dummy variables; the third level of the model includes interaction terms between centered pre-screen symbolic racism and the dummy variables. The models are not significant (third level: (F(5, 41) = 1.66, p = .17, R^2 = .17). I also estimated a logistic regression model with the binary likelihood of winning the election variable as the dependent variable and the same predictor variables. The model is again non-significant at all levels (third level: χ^2(5, N = 55) = 3.16, p = .68; Cox and Snell R^2 = .07). I estimated both models again for those in the white candidate dependent variable condition. Again, the models are non-significant. The third level of the trait ratings is as follows: (F(5, 44) = .79, p = .56, R^2 = .08). The third level of the likelihood of winning the election is as follows: : χ^2(5, N = 54) = 7.07, p = .22; Cox and Snell R^2 = .13. Thus, meta-racist humor, whether delivered by a black or white comedian, appears not to impact candidate evaluation, offering no support for H1, or H2. Table 6.2 through 6.4 offer the regression coefficients for the third levels of these models.

Table 6.2 Candidate Trait Ratings – Black Candidate

	B (SE)	p
Constant	4.66 (.30)	.000***
Prescreen	-.66 (1.38)	.66
IMRH	.48 (.41)	.24
OMRH	.59 (.40)	.15
IMRH*Prescreen	-2.56 (2.18)	.25
OMRH*Prescreen	-1.59 (2.25)	.48

†p < **.10. ***p < **.05. ****p < **.01. *****p < **.001**

Table 6.3 Candidate Trait Ratings – White Candidate

	B (SE)	p
Constant	4.78 (.19)	.000***
Prescreen	-1.56 (1.67)	.35
IMRH	.09 (.27)	.75
OMRH	.40 (.27)	..15
IMRH*Prescreen	.95 (2.05)	.65
OMRH*Prescreen	2.33 (2.20)	.29

†p < **.10. ***p < **.05. ****p < **.01. *****p < **.001.**

Table 6.4 Likelihood of Winning – Black Candidate

	B (SE)	p
Constant	-.10 (.59)	.86
Prescreen	3.07	.29*
IMRH	-.36 (.81)	.66
OMRH	-1.03 (.83)	.21
IMRH*Prescreen	-2.38 (4.40)	.72
OMRH*Prescreen	-4.22 (4.92)	.39

†p < **.10. ***p < **.05. ****p < **.01. *****p < **.001.**

Table 6.5 Likelihood of Winning – White Candidate

	B (SE)	p
Constant	-1.47 (.69)	.03**
Prescreen	-3.15(5.79)	.59
IMRH	-.18 (1.02)	.86
OMRH	.17 (.96)	.86
IMRH*Prescreen	12.11 (7.52)	.11
OMRH*Prescreen	9.24 (7.68)	.23

†$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present research offers insight into understanding the effects of meta-racist humor, with an emphasis on comedian race. Study 1 and Study 2 both delivered null results regarding the effect of meta-racist humor by comedian race on post-manipulation Symbolic Racism and evaluations of a white or black political candidate. The null effects may be partially explained by a manipulation check built into the design. Immediately after viewing each clips, participants were asked to answer the question, "Do you think this clip makes fun of anyone? If so, whom." This may have led participants to explicitly think about race which, in turn, may have reduced the effects.

Study 1 did find that watching a white comedian make meta-racist jokes marginally increases perceptions of discrimination. Perhaps because it is a white comedian delivering racist jokes, however ironically, viewers in turn realize that racism is still a problem. Further, participants viewed the OMRH as more offensive than IMRH, a finding not replicated in Study 2 despite using the same clips. This finding suggests that meta-racist humor may indeed be calling attention to racism as a problem. That is, perhaps meta-racist humor can have a *positive* impact. Brown & Youmans (2012)

similarly find a positive effect of meta-disparagement humor such that watching meta-anti-Arab humor decreases anti-Arab racism and increases evaluations of Qatar-based news outlet Al Jazeera English when coupled with exposure to the network. Further, while the clips were matched based on length and topic, the jokes are not identical. Thus, differences could be attributable to comedian group status or joke content. Future studies should use constructed, identical source material, changing only comedian race between conditions, to offer a higher degree of control.

Nonetheless, the results here seem to be inconsistent with the findings of the previous chapters, which together suggest meta-disparagement humor has negative consequences. As detailed in the previous chapters and recapped in the introduction to the present chapter, meta-racist humor is in fact different than meta-disparagement humor targeting women, gay people, and Arabs. Meta-racist humor is the most "successful" in make prejudice a clear joke target. Further, the ratio of meta- versus direct disparagement humor is largest for blacks. And, a survey reveals it is less acceptable to make fun of blacks than the other three groups. Perhaps, then, meta-racist is the most clearly ironic, paving the way for potential *positive* effects. The connections between the experimental results, as well as the theoretical and qualitative assessments, will be discussed in more depth in the following, final chapter.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion

This dissertation motivates, defines, and tests the implications of what I have termed "meta-disparagement" humor, or the fusion of irony and disparagement humor. Based on the existing literature, I embarked on this exploration with a belief that meta-disparagement humor is a symptom of post-racialism, post-sexism, and post-political correctness. Overall, the empirical studies presented in the previous chapters both support and complicate this notion. That is, meta-disparagement humor is not only a symptom of this larger climate of post-political correctness, but also a commentary on it. This type of humor invites the audience to consider political correctness as an achieved ideal, a hollow hope, or somewhere in between. And meta-disparagement humor appears to have different effects depending on the group disparaged, audience levels of prejudice, and how the resulting stereotypes are measured. Here, I briefly review the findings of each chapter to make explicit this unifying argument, highlighting my key contributions along the way. Then, I move to the broader implications of this line of inquiry.

Chapter 1 introduced meta-disparagement humor as comedy that ironically makes fun of a minority. Meta-disparagement humor thus operates on two levels. Explicitly, these jokes target minorities. Implicitly, they ridicule prejudice. I then grounded this concept in the humor and stereotyping / prejudice literatures. This established meta-disparagement humor as linked to a larger climate of post political

correctness and, thus, a concept worthy of inquiry. Chapter 1 laid the groundwork for the ensuing empirical chapters, which investigate the content and effects of meta-disparagement humor that targets black, women, gay people, and Arabs.

Chapter 2 deconstructed the mechanisms of meta-disparagement humor in six popular television series. The discursive textual analysis identified common trends of this type of humor across the series. Specifically, I put forth what I call "hyperbole of prejudice," whereby stereotypes are exaggerated to the point of absurdity in order to undermine these very stereotypes. Herein lies the key and problematic tension of meta-disparagement humor: comedy of this variety must indulge in stereotypes to ridicule them. In addition to hyperbole of prejudice, this type of humor also operates by mounting a progressive argument then drawing a prejudiced conclusion, thus highlighting the illogical nature of prejudice.

Ultimately, I find that meta-disparagement humor critiques political correctness. Specifically, it problematizes political correctness as a sometimes vacant ideal adhered to by some for fear of social repercussions, not promotion of egalitarianism. Further, this type of humor hints that some people's prejudice is insurmountable; but, because it results from ignorance and not hatred, it is funny and excusable. The textual analysis further finds that the use of meta-disparagement humor changes by series, a variance closely connected to style and degree of audience address. Finally, different groups receive different treatment. Specifically, meta-racist and meta-sexist humor are the most "successful," as racism and sexism are the clear targets. Yet, in this indictment of sexist and racist stereotypes, sexist and racist stereotyping occurs. Meta-disparagement

humor that targets gay people and Arabs, on the other hand, both panders to and critiques homophobia and xenophobia with harder to decipher irony. In sum, the textual analysis clearly establishes meta-disparagement humor as a double-edged sword, sharpened by the use of stereotypes to simultaneously pierce prejudice and the veil of post-political correctness.

Chapter 3 elaborated on and quantified the findings of Chapter 2. Study 1's content analysis finds that women, followed by blacks, gay people, and Arabs, are more likely to both tell and be targeted by both non-meta-disparagement humor and meta-disparagement humor. Both types of jokes are also more likely to target all four minorities than be delivered by them. This highlights the power differentials embedded in humor in general meta-disparagement humor in particular. Using a survey, Study 2 established baseline levels of discrimination towards the four groups. Making fun of women is significantly more acceptable than making fun of blacks and gay people. The survey also finds that Arabs, followed by gay people, blacks, and women are perceived to face the most discrimination. This discrimination is also considered to be justified, as respondents indicated discrimination against Arabs to be more acceptable than the other three groups. This survey is the first of its kind to compare attitudes between these four groups and to further consider discrimination and humor in tandem. The textual analysis of Chapter 2 and content analysis of Chapter 3 helped define meta-disparagement humor in today's political, social, and popular culture landscapes, focusing on these four groups of interest. The survey of Chapter 3 helped define

attitudes towards these groups. Together, these studies set the stage for the experimental work.

Chapter 4 measured the effects of meta-sexist humor on stereotype activation and stereotype application. In this experiment, participants watched sexist, meta-sexist, or non-sexist humor. To measure stereotype activation, or the salience of stereotypes, participants then completed Lexical Decision Task (LDT), which measures reaction time to words, including sexist words. I find partial support for my hypothesis that both sexist and meta-sexist humor appear to activate stereotypes in viewers, regardless of baseline sexism. However, these results are trending but nonsignificant. To measure stereotype activation, participants rated a female or male potential job candidate on a variety of traits and hiring capacities. These results were null, finding no effect of either direct or meta- sexist humor on stereotype activation.

Chapter 5 tests the effects of meta-disparagement humor that targets gay people (Study 1) and Arabs (Study 2) on support for policies concerning these groups. In both studies, participants viewed direct disparagement humor, meta-disparagement humor, or control humor and then indicated their support for a variety of political policies. In Study 1, results suggest that directly homophobic humor depresses support for gay rights. Meta-homophobic humor did not have an effect on support for gay rights. In Study 2, on the other hand, results suggest that meta-anti-Arab humor depresses support for Arab rights, while direct anti-Arab humor did not have a significant effect. This pair of studies also introduced the possibility for backdoor effects via what I have termed "super spreading activation theory." According to spreading activation theory,

once a stereotype about Group X is primed, all stereotypes about Group X become salient. Super spreading activation theory extends this to other groups. That is, once a stereotype about Group X is primed, not only do all stereotypes about Group X become salient, but so do stereotypes about other groups. In Study 1, meta-homophobic humor decreases support for other minorities. Study 2 shows an opposite backdoor effect of the homophobic humor study, whereby the effect of direct anti-Arab humor on support for other minorities depends on baseline Arab prejudice. Specifically, those high in Arab prejudice showed more support for other minority rights when exposed direct anti-Arab humor relative to control. This surprising result runs opposite to my predictions. Yet, there was no main effect of direct disparagement humor in this model. Further, both studies suggest evidence that ethnocentrism, not authoritarianism, drives this backdoor effect. That is, where both correlate highly with discrimination of out-group members, only authoritarianism is correlated with conservatism. That conservatism does not appear to be activated in these studies supports the presence of ethnocentrism, not authoritarianism.

Chapter 6 tests the effects of meta-racist humor on attitudes towards African Americans, this time varying comedian group status. That is, participants either viewed meta-racist humor from a white or black comedian, or non-racist humor in the control condition. In Study 1, participants then completed the Symbolic Racism inventory and indicated their perceptions of the prevalence of discrimination. While the study yields null results on the former, watching a white comedian deliver meta-racist humor marginally increases perceptions of discrimination – a potentially *positive* effect of

meta-disparagement humor. In Study 2, participants evaluated a white or black political candidate. All results were null.

Taken together, the experimental results speak to the complicated nature of this type of humor, such that its impact depends on characteristics of the comedian, the joke target, and the audience. These experimental results and non-results build from and confirm the conclusions of the qualitative textual analysis and survey. That is, humor targeting women, followed by blacks, is both more prevalent and more acceptable. Thus, it makes sense that moving attitudes towards these groups would be more difficult. Further, it is less common and more acceptable to make fun of gay people and Arabs, while discrimination of the latter is also more acceptable, thus contextualizing why these experimental manipulations more closely matched my predictions.

As detailed in the literature review and in the experimental chapters, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) outlines two mental routes in processing information. In effortful processing, an individual wants to and can critically evaluate. In the peripheral route, information is not challenged and is thus more persuasive. The hypotheses developed and tested in this dissertation were predicated upon the idea that humor induces a positive mood. Individuals engaging with humor therefore either approach the messages contained in the jokes from the peripheral root as rooted in a positive predisposition going into consumption or switch to the peripheral route once a positive mood is induced. It is possible, however, that a laboratory setting mitigates the positive affect associated with humor, thus enabling participants to switch to or remain in effortful processing. A real-world setting for the experiments would help parse this

apart and, possibly, garner more significant findings. Further, the meta-disparagement comprehension variables suggest that most people do not in fact understand the irony. Future should try a different operationalization of this variable to ensure that irony comprehension is lacking and, if it is, seek to induce irony comprehension. This would allow a truer test of the effect of this type of humor.

Meta-disparagement humor is a complicated phenomenon. As evidenced by the textual analysis, meta-disparagement humor is enabled by being difficult to pin down. It is at once ironic and offensive, progressive and prejudiced, egalitarian and exclusive. Meaning floats between ends on multiple continua. Viewers can then decode the jokes at any point in their diffuse definitions. Further, viewers can move between levels of irony. It is also worth noting that achieving inter-coder reliability for the content analysis proved exceedingly difficult. Even trained coders sometimes disagreed on the classification of a joke as direct or meta- disparagement. Further still, different groups receive different treatment by this type of humor, a pattern that maps onto more general societal trends towards these groups. The mixed experimental results make sense in the broader tapestry of this type of humor. Taken together, this empirical work suggest that this type of humor is a) complicated and b) tends to have negative effects.

While the documented negative effects may lead some to suggest the next logical step is advocacy of censorship, this is not my goal. On the contrary, this body of work is a call to awareness. As detailed throughout, the invocation of one stereotype activates other stereotypes about that group and, as partially evidenced here, other groups. But previous research and the current dissertation suggest that effortful

processing depresses the likelihood that these salient stereotypes will be used in judgment. That is, awareness decreases the chance that involuntarily enacted stereotypes become discriminatory behavior. This purposeful pause allows the problems of racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia to become present, challenging the illusions of a post-prejudice society. True, the motivation to take this pause requires an internal drive for egalitarianism and discerning viewing not shared by all. But media literacy of this sort could open the door to conversations of different scales about the true nature of prejudice in today's society.

Some scholars argue that satire (Day, 2011; Jones, 2010) and irony (Jones, 2012) may be the new authenticity. They focus on satire and irony in the political realm, highlighting the earnest call to active citizenship. My dissertation dovetails with this notion. Specifically, the work cumulatively suggests that irony in general, and meta-disparagement humor in particular, is not the new authenticity, but an opening to authenticity. That is, if we can navigate the layers of meta-disparagement humor, there we can find an inlet to understanding the prejudices that persist in a supposedly post-prejudice society. The work presented highlights the complicated nature of meta-disparagement humor. It is by definition ironic, skewering prejudice by invoking hyperbolized stereotypes. The experiments suggest this may, to add another layer of irony, actually increase prejudice in some cases. It is the recognition of the problematic nature of this irony that may invite a deeper decoding of the irony embedded in meta-disparagement humor. That is, recognizing the problematic nature of this kind of humor can be an inroad to understanding the problems of society. Without this critical

engagement, however, this type of humor can be dangerous. Thus, the double-edged sword of meta-disparagement humor can pierce the veil of false notions of post-feminism, post-racism, and post-prejudice, but only if it can turn the sword on meta-disparagement itself. The mixed methodologies of this dissertation, drawing from both the qualitative and quantitative traditions, shed light on meta-disparagement humor's content, prevalence, position, and effects, ultimately suggesting that meta-disparagement is indeed an irony of ironies.

Appendix A – Experiment Stimuli Descriptions

Chapter 4

Clip 1 and Clip 3 were held constant across conditions. Clip 1, from *Saturday Night Live* with a run time of 1:53, features cast member Andy Samberg playing actor and former pop star Mark Wahlberg. In the skit Samberg as Walberg simply talks to animals live on stage. Sample dialogue includes: "Now Ima talk to a chicken. Hey chicken how's it hangin? Lotta people wanna eat you, but I just wanna talk to you, okay?" Clip 3, from *The Simpsons* with a run time of 1:34, tells the history of April Fools Day. Father Homer plays April Fools jokes on son Bart. Then, sister Lisa steps in and tells the brief history of the holiday as rooted in paganism. The clip ends with clean cut neighbors the Flanders playing a trick on the Simpson family.

Clips two and four varied by condition. The control condition featured additional neutral stimuli. Clip 2 in the control condition, from *Community* with a run time of 0:33, depicts two characters (played by Donald Glover and Danny Pudi) from the community college preparing for a water fight. A senior citizen student (played by Chevy Chase) appears with a tiny squirt gun, prompting laughs. But then he sprays with pepper water. Clip 4, from *Saturday Night Live* with a runtime of 1:43, is a fake commercial from *Saturday Night Live* mock promoting an online college.

Clip 2 for the direct sexist humor (DSH) condition, was from *How I Met Your Mother* with a runtime 1:31, shows two male characters hiding behind fake indoor trees

in an office on safari for cougars, i.e. older women who date younger men. They identify

the cougar by characteristics: young looking hairstyles, medium cleavage display, long

fingernails. The cougar in question turns out to be a law professor. One character asks,

"Who would you rather have grading your papers: a savage man-eating jungle cat or a

purring, satisfied kitty?" The other character instructs him to "go mount and stuff that

cougar." Clip 4 for the DSH condition, from *Entourage* with runtime: 1:14, depicts four

male characters rating women on a scale of one to ten as they walk by, a litmus to test

to determine whom to invite to a movie premier. When one woman passes, a male

character gives her a six because, "She was top tall, bro. Torso's too long, legs are too

short. She was inverted." They count they have given out 50 tickets, leading to two to

say in unison, "feeding frenzy."

Clip 2 for the meta-sexist condition (MSH), from *Da Ali G Show* with a runtime of

2:47, features Sacha Baron Cohen as his gangster persona Ali G interviewing a gender

researcher in the United Kingdom. After the researcher corrects Ali G that there has

indeed been a female prime minister, Ali G asks whether another woman will be able to

"slip through," if a woman should be entitled to any career, and if the researchers would

feel safe in a plane flown by a female pilot. Ali G shares he does not feel safe with a

woman driver or pilot, worried she would be easily distracted. The interviewee calls him

prejudiced. Ali G then announces many guys are trying to get their girls into feminism.

As the conversation continues, it becomes clear that he not only means lesbianism, but

lesbianism for male gratification. When the interviewee catches on, she calls him out on

his conflation, as she explains, "feminism is not about sex, not about having sex

relations with other women." Clip 4 for the MSH condition, from *The Office*, shows boss Michael taking the female office workers to the mall to buy one thing at Victoria's Secret on him to show he appreciates women.

Chapter 5

Study 1

Clip 1 and Clip 3 were held constant across conditions. Clip 1 is the same *Simpsons* used in the previous chapter (Clip 3 in that study). Clip 3 is from *The Big Bang Theory* (runtime; 1:32) and shows two scientist characters playing a variation on the classic decision game: "Rock, paper, scissors, lizard, spock." The clip explains the complicated rules.

The additional neutral clips in the control conditions included the *Saturday Night Live* "Mark Wahlberg Talks to Animals" bit, also used in the previous study (there as Clip 1), as Clip 2. Clip 4 was from *Community* (runtime 0:37) and features two characters (Donald Glover and Danny Pudi) in Halloween talking in silly voices about Halloween candy. One of the characters says, "That's one of my biggest fears, f I were to wake up as a doughnut." The other character agrees with his hypothetical worries of doughnut cannibalism.

Clip 2 in the direct disparagement humor (DDH) condition features Randy Kagan's stand-up bit "Gay People" (runtime: 1:49) from Comedy Central's website. In the bit, Kagan imagines what a gay GPS voice would say, suggesting, "In seven miles, listen, your buns feel super. Why don't we just find a rest area and do this thing." He then complains that gays stole the rainbow: "Now when I look at a rainbow I gotta think

of man-on-man monkey but love? That doesn't see fair." Finally, he suggests they instead take the unicorn as superior symbol because of its horn as an instrument of sexual gratification. Finally, he offers faux support of gay men serving in the military, as torture would appeal to this group. DDH Clip 4 comes from the sitcom *Two and a Half Men* (runtime: 0:35) in which the father characters reads a poem written on the day of his son's birth. The son responds with the one-liner pejorative, "Gay."

MDH Clip 2 is from *30 Rock* (runtime: 1:06). In the bit, Liz (Tina Fey) enters her apartment to find her visiting gay cousin (Jeffrey Self) with "SLUT" written all over his face. Angry, Liz says, "That's it, I am taking you to the port authority." When the cousin is eager, Liz explains, "to take a bus home, not to meet people." The cousin then says he wants to give Liz a makeover first and, after making fun of her for still using the word "fierce," locks Liz in the closet. MDH Clip 4 is from *Scrubs* (runtime: 0:27) and shows the imagined scene that plays out in answer to the question of a potential gay baby test. A women has an ultrasound and, on the screen, the fetus dances to the Village People's "Macho Man."

Clips 2 from DDH and MDH were matched on length and number of jokes, as were Clips 4 from DDH and MDH.

Study 2

Clips 1 and 3, held constant across all conditions, are identical to those used in Study 1. The control condition's additional filler Clips 2 and 4 are also the same as in Study 1.

DDH Clip 2 is a stand-up routine by Jim Norton (runtime 2:19) in which he complains about a Muslim woman in Florida who sued the state for not allowing her to keep her veil on in her driver's license photo. In response to the woman's claim she wanted things to be like they are in a traditional Muslim country, Norton responds, "that would be fine if I could beat her on a street corner with a stick." He adds, "And while you're at it, hand over that clitoris, you won't be using that any time soon." He goes onto explain it is actually an American white woman who converted making this demands, and ends saying the KKK is the only other religion that only displays the slits of their eyes and dress like tampons. DDH Clip 4 is from ventriloquist Jeff Dunham (runtime 4:53). In the bit, Dunham's skeleton puppet called Ahmed the Dead Terrorist wants to sing Christmas carols, like "Bin Laden is Coming to Town," "Oh Holy Crap," "Silence! Night," and "Jingle Bombs." Ahmed goes onto sing "Jingle Bombs," with such lines as, "Dashing through the sand, with a bomb strapped to my back, I have a nasty plan, for Christmas in Iraq" and "Where are all the virgins that Bin Laden promised me?"

MDH Clip 2 comes from *The Colbert Report* (runtime 4:36) and was chosen as a counterpart to DDH Clip 4. Colbert charges terrorists with taking over our country by slipping the name of their leader into our Christmas carols, singing, "Fa-la-la Allah, Allah, Allah." He talks about a change in school schedules to give a day off school for a Muslim holiday, which Colbert labels, "the ultimate Islamo-fascist recruiting tool." Next, he reports on Campbell's announces plans to start a line of Hilal soup. Referencing the contested construction of a mosque near ground zero, Colbert asks, "How dare they construct a tower of Islamic soup so close to ground beef?" To balance the Hilal soup,

Colbert suggests a line of soup offensive to Muslims, including, "Pork and Cartoons of Muhammad." Finally, Colbert expresses his outrage that Kellog's offers 25 Hial cereals. He suggests changing the Trix slogan to, "Silly rabbit, Trix are for puppets of the Zionist state." Clip 4 is from *The Office* (runtime: 0:35) and is chosen as a counterpart to the short DDH Clip 2. Boss Michael (Steve Carell) freaks out when he sees a man with a turban approach the building. He instructs his employees to lock the door and turn off the lights. In the next scene, Michael admits in interview, "The IT tech guy and me did not get off to a great start."

Chapter 6

This experiment included three clips in each condition. Clips 1 and 2 were the same across condition – *The Simpsons* April Fools and *Big Bang Theory* Rock, Paper, Scissors, Lizard, Spock clips are the same used in earlier studies. Clip 3 in the control condition was the *Saturday Night Live* "Mark Wahlberg Talks to Animals" clip also detailed above.

In the OMRH condition, Clip 4 an installment of *The Colbert Report* called "Blackwashing" (runtime 6:29). Colbert begins by discussing Jimmy Carter's claim that animosity toward Barrack Obama is race-based. Colbert counters saying people really just disagree with his policies, which is why he has been called "that boy" and "uppity," and why such images as Obama in tribal wear on a fake health care poster or watermelons covering the White House lawn on a fake post card are in circulation. Colbert then shows clips of Glen Beck and Rush Limbaugh calling Obama's policies "reparations." Colbert later laments that, "Sadly, anytime a racist criticizes the president,

someone cries 'racism.'" Colbert proposes blackwashing as a solution. Specifically, he suggests, "What better way to prove you're not a racist than by highlighting a fellow critic's race." But since stealing black children from their parents to be raised by racists isn't likely with a Democratic congress, he ultimately proposes that, if you can't find a black person who agrees with you just use shoe polish – "the traditional way for racists to show they have nothing against black people."

IMRH Clip 3 features a Larry Wilmore bit on *The Daily Show*. Wilmore begins by asserting Obama's populating comes down to his skin color. Then, he shows a clip of Larry King telling his audience that his eight-year-old son wants to be black. After expressing dismay that King has a son that young, Wilmore declares, "Black is in." He then traces the history black popularity, the last time being the construction of the pyramids using white slaves. But Wilmore worries it's gone too far, as Robert Downey Jr. received an Oscar nomination for playing a character in black face. So Wilmore offers to change places with King's son so he can be black. He coaches him on some of the more difficult points – long church services and endless Tyler Perry movies. Wilmore ends by saying that humoring white friends is especially exhausting. When Stewart expresses concern, Wilmore fake reassuring Stewart he's not humoring him, too.

The clips were chosen based on similarity of length and explicit engagement with Obama's skin color and white reappropriation of Obama's blackness.

Appendix B – Prescreen Inventories

Chapter 4

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory

(all answered on a 5-point scale ranging from Strongly Agree (1) to Strongly Disagree (5))

1. **Many** women are actually seeking special favors, such as hiring policies that

   favor them over men, under the guise of asking for equality.

2. Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist.

3. Women are too easily offended.

4. Most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for them.

5. Women seek to gain power by getting control over men.

Chapter 5

Study 1

Homophobia Scale

(all answered on a 5-point scale ranging from Strongly Agree (1) to Strongly Disagree (5))

1. Gay people make me nervous.

2. I make derogatory statements about gay people.

3. I tease and make jokes about gay people.

4. I fear homosexual persons will make sexual advances towards me.

5. I avoid gay people.

Study 2

Arab Prejudice Scale

(all answered on a 5-point scale ranging from Strongly Agree (1) to Strongly Disagree (5))

1. A major fault of Arab-Americans is their conceit, overbearing pride, and their idea that they are a chosen ethnic group.

2. Even for Arab-Americans who live in America, their first loyalty is to their home country rather than to America.

3. If there are too many Arab-Americans in America, our country will be less safe.

4. I can hardly imagine myself voting for an Arab-American who is running for an important political office.

5. If an Arab-American family moved into my neighborhood, I would be uncomfortable.

Chapter 6

Symbolic Racism Scale

(answered with "Strongly Agree," "Somewhat Agree," "Somewhat Disagree," or "Strongly Disagree" unless otherwise noted).

1. It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.

2. Irish, Italian, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same.

3. Some say that black leaders have been trying to push too fast. Others feel that they haven't pushed fast enough. What do you think? (Answers "Trying to push very much too fast," "Going too slowly," or "Going at the right pace")

4. How much of the racial tension that exists in the United States today do you think blacks are responsible for creating? (Answers: "All of it," "Most," "Some," "Not much at all")

5. How much discrimination against blacks do you feel there is in the United States today, limiting their chances to get ahead? (Answers: "A lot," "Some," "Just a little," or "None at all)

6. Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.

7. Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve.

8. Over the past few years, blacks have gotten more economically than they deserve.

Appendix C – Outcome Variables

Chapter 4

Lexical Decision Task (LDT) Words

Nurturer: loving, caring, nurture, mother sister

Sex objects: babe, bimbo, panties, playboy, sex

General: intuitive, irrational, inferior, emotional, weak

Ambiguous words: easy, strip, cherry, bush, screw

Chapter 5

Study 1

Public Policy Questions

(answered on different scales; gay rights questions bolded; other minority questions

italicized; conservatism questions underlined)

1. Do you approve or disapprove of the job Barack Obama is doing?

2. *As you may know, since 2001, the United States has held people from other*

   countries who are suspected of being terrorists in a prison at Guantanamo Bay in

   Cuba. Do you agree with Barrack Obama's plan to close the prison?

3. **Do you think marriages between same sex couples should or should not be**

   recognized as valid by the law, with the same rights as traditional marriages?

4. *In your opinion, should immigration be kept at its present level, increased or*

   decreased?

5. Do you favor or oppose offshore drilling for oil and gas in U.S. coastal regions?

6. Do you think abortion should be legal under any circumstances, legal only under certain circumstances or illegal in all circumstances?

7. **Do you favor or oppose allowing openly gay men and women to serve in the military?**

8. Do you think the U.S. government made a mistake in sending troops to Iraq?

9. Thinking back on some of the major pieces of legislation Congress has passed in the last two years, would you say you approve or disapprove of government aid to banks and major financial institutions that were in danger of failing?

10. Do you consider yourself to be a supporter of the Tea Party movement, an opponent of the Tea Party movement, or neither?

11. **Do you think gay or lesbian couples, in other words, homosexual couples, should be legally permitted to adopt children?**

12. *Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?*

13. *Should companies that have discriminated against blacks have to have an affirmative action program?*

14. Recently, there has been a lot of talk about how to spend the extra money the federal government is likely to have in the near future. Some people have proposed that most of the expected federal budget surplus should be used to cut taxes. Do you approve or disapprove of this proposal?

15. Should federal spending on unemployment insurance should be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?

16. <u>Do you think there should or should not be a law that would ban the possession of handguns, except by the police and other authorized persons?</u>

17. **There is a proposal to expand federal hate crime laws to include crimes committed on the basis of the victim's gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Would you favor or oppose expanding the federal hate crime laws in this way?**

18. *Some people have suggested that airline passengers who fit the profile of terrorists based on their age, ethnicity or gender should be subjected to special, more intensive security checks before boarding U.S. flights. Do you favor or oppose this practice?*

19. Do you think the use of marijuana should be made legal?

20. *Do you think it is appropriate or inappropriate to build a mosque and Islamic center near Ground Zero?*

Study 2

Public Policy Questions

(answered on different scales; Arab rights questions bolded; other minority questions italicized; conservatism questions underlined)

1. <u>Do you approve or disapprove of the job Barack Obama is doing?</u>

2. As you may know, since 2001, the United States has held people from other countries who are suspected of being terrorists in a prison at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. Do you agree with Barrack Obama's plan to close the prison?

3. **Do you think most Muslims were angry at the recent killing of Osama Bin Laden by American troops?**

4. *In your opinion, should immigration be kept at its present level, increased or decreased?*

5. Do you favor or oppose offshore drilling for oil and gas in U.S. coastal regions?

6. Do you think abortion should be legal under any circumstances, legal only under certain circumstances or illegal in all circumstances?

7. *Do you favor or oppose allowing openly gay men and women to serve in the military?*

8. Do you think the U.S. government made a mistake in sending troops to Iraq?

9. Thinking back on some of the major pieces of legislation Congress has passed in the last two years, would you say you approve or disapprove of government aid to banks and major financial institutions that were in danger of failing?

10. Do you consider yourself to be a supporter of the Tea Party movement, an opponent of the Tea Party movement, or neither?

11. **Do you think the US should adopt a policy that forbids female students from wearing hijabs (traditional Muslim headscarves) to school?**

12. *Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?*

13. *Should companies that have discriminated against blacks have to have an affirmative action program?*

14. Recently, there has been a lot of talk about how to spend the extra money the federal government is likely to have in the near future. Some people have

proposed that most of the expected federal budget surplus should be used to cut taxes. Do you approve or disapprove of this proposal?

15. Should federal spending on unemployment insurance should be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?

16. Do you think there should or should not be a law that would ban the possession of handguns, except by the police and other authorized persons?

17. Do you think spoken prayer that specifically mentions Jesus Christ should be allowed in public schools?

18. **Some people have suggested that airline passengers who fit the profile of terrorists based on their age, ethnicity or gender should be subjected to special, more intensive security checks before boarding U.S. flights. Do you favor or oppose this practice?**

19. Do you think the use of marijuana should be made legal?

20. **Do you think it is appropriate or inappropriate to build a mosque and Islamic center near Ground Zero?**

Chapter 6

Study 1

Symbolic Racism Scale

(answered with "Strongly Agree," "Somewhat Agree," "Somewhat Disagree," or "Strongly Disagree" unless otherwise noted).

1. It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites. (

2. Irish, Italian, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same.

3. Some say that black leaders have been trying to push too fast. Others feel that they haven't pushed fast enough. What do you think? (Answers "Trying to push very much too fast," "Going too slowly," or "Going at the right pace")

4. How much of the racial tension that exists in the United States today do you think blacks are responsible for creating? (Answers: "All of it," "Most," "Some," "Not much at all")

5. How much discrimination against blacks do you feel there is in the United States today, limiting their chances to get ahead? (Answers: "A lot," "Some," "Just a little," or "None at all)

6. Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.

7. Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve.

8. Over the past few years, blacks have gotten more economically than they deserve.

Perceptions of Discrimination Task

Directions: Next, you will indicate how often you believe Blacks in this country experience discrimination in each of the following situations (with 0 = Never and 4 = Very Frequently)

Answered for: in the classroom, in the workforce, from police, from fellow white

employees, from teaching assistants and faculty, in the form of staring by white people,

in the form of racial slurs

Study 2

Candidate Biography

After 8 years serving as a city councilman, Kevin Miller is running for mayor of

Middletown. Hard-working and dedicated, Kevin Miller hopes to bring that passion to

the position of mayor. He plans to continue to fight for increased education funding. He

also supports small business and reducing crime.

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