

This is Not an Inside Joke: Perceptible Attributes Influence The Successful Communication of Humor

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The purpose of this study was to examine whether personality information could influence humor orientation (HO) perceptions. Participants completed a pre-test that assessed their perceptions of another individual, partook in a distraction activity, and then completed a post-test that re-assessed their perceptions of the same individual. A manipulation of psychological characteristics was executed during the post-test administration. Findings revealed that positive attributes resulted in an increase in humor orientation (HO) perceptions while negative attributes resulted in a decrease in humor orientation (HO) perceptions. Study implications suggest perceptible idiosyncrasies can affect how funny or not funny we deem an interpersonal partner.

The salient nature of humor in interpersonal communication has been thoroughly documented by academic researchers and has been noticeably prevalent in popular stories similar to the following:

Two muffins were sitting in an oven, and the first looks over to the second, and says, ‘man it's really hot in here.’ The second looks over at the first with a surprised look, and answers, ‘Whoa, a talking muffin!’ (nerdtests, 2014)

While the incongruous information that was supplied in the preceding anecdote may or may not have generated mirth, the aforementioned anecdote has affected your perception of whether the author is skilled (or not skilled) at enacting a humorous message. Experimental analyses devoted to the proficiency of a communicator at producing humorous comments have labeled this knack a humor orientation (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991). Empirical research into the humor orientation (HO) phenomenon has maintained a relatively broad scope and revealed that cohesion is likely to develop in interpersonal dyads in which higher levels of humor orientation (HO) are present (Maki, Booth-Butterfield, & McMullen, 2012), suggested that people who are proficient in humor orientation (HO) are also adept at fostering a positive mood in their one-on-one social interactions (Bippus, 2000), and asserted that interpersonal communicators who possess a high humor orientation (HO) are also expert with regard to interpreting the nonverbal turn-taking cues of another individual (Mereolla, 2006). Indeed, the humor orientation (HO) concept has captured the attention of communication studies scholars. At the same time, additional research could yield new insight on this prominent communication construct.

The current study investigated humor orientation (HO) within an interpersonal communication framework. This investigation was completed to discover the extent to which perceptions of humor orientation (HO) and stated psychological attributes were interconnected variables. A review of previous literature was first undertaken to highlight relevant humor orientation (HO) findings that were germane to this social experiment. Quantitative analyses were subsequently completed to analyze the perceptions of study participants. All things considered, the main goal of this social experiment was to

determine whether personality attributes could influence whether we regard another person as funny.

Literature Review

Humor orientation (HO) has emerged as a premier concept in the arena of humorous messages research. A humor orientation (HO) is the extent to which a communicator can intentionally and effectively produce humor in a variety of different contexts (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991). Seminal reporting by Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) revealed that individuals who scored high on the humor orientation (HO) scale found: “more situations as appropriate for their humor attempts and, importantly, they also see fewer situations as inappropriate” (p. 215) for their attempts at humor. Subsequent research by Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (1996) indicated that individuals who were regarded by others as being skilled at producing humor were also regarded by others as being socially attractive. It was along a similar line that Wrench and McCroskey (2001) reported that extraversion and humor orientation (HO) shared a strong positive correlation. Aune and Wong (2002) discovered that humor orientation (HO) was positively correlated with feelings of playfulness in a relationship. While early studies devoted to humor orientation (HO) mainly focused on correlative relationships, succeeding research has investigated different avenues related to the orientation of a humorous communicator.

A robust amount of humor orientation (HO) scholarship has examined the enactment of humorous messages within the confines of academia. A sample of American undergraduate students in a study by Claus, Booth-Butterfield, and Chory (2012) suggested that interpersonal attraction and humor orientation (HO) shared a positive association with student perceptions of the overall relational closeness of their instructor. Aylor and Oppliger (2003) reported that: “with regard to out-of-class interactions, perceived instructor qualities such as kindness, compassion, and helpfulness – much like instructor humor orientation – promote student-instructor conversations that extend to issues beyond the specifics of course assignments and information” (p. 132). However, Zhang (2005) claimed that favorable ratings regarding the humor orientation (HO) of a university instructor actually brought about feelings of classroom communication apprehension amongst a sample of Chinese college students. These investigations illustrate that humor orientation (HO) perceptions can influence the feelings and messages of college students while related humor orientation (HO) studies have examined the suitability of humor within the classroom walls.

Analyzing the appropriateness or inappropriateness of humor in the university classroom is another significant point of discussion because that genre of research and the present study utilized a sample of college students. Scholarship by Bainbridge Frymier, Wanzer, and Wojtaszczyk (2008) concluded that humor oriented college students regarded the offensive humor and “other disparaging humor” (p. 275) of their teachers as appropriate because humor oriented college students frequently enact similar types of behaviors. It was on a less specific level that Banas, Dunbar, Rodriguez, and Liu (2011) broadly proclaimed that: “students with a high humor orientation may prefer humor in their instruction” (p. 138). At the same time, Banas and colleagues advised that low humor orientation (HO) instructors should be cautious of trying to be overly humorous in class as students are opposed to an unfunny person trying to be funny (Banas, Dunbar,

Rodriguez, & Liu, 2011). That noted, a study by Ziyaeemehr and Kumar (2014) revealed that ESL students believed they learned more from instructors who were perceived as high in humor orientation (HO) in the classroom. Even though it appears that the individual cultural background of a person could potentially influence humor orientation (HO) evaluations, it is also important for the present research to address the function of humor during initial interaction.

The extant literature specifically focused on humor orientation (HO) during the first meeting of interpersonal strangers is minimal. However, related research by Fraley and Aron (2004) discovered that a shared humorous experience helped to create a feeling of closeness between dyadic strangers meeting for the first time. A novel investigation by Graham (1995) paired unacquainted individuals into dyads in order to test uncertainty reduction. Findings indicated that feelings of uncertainty were significantly lower in the initial interactions of the dyads that possessed a high sense of humor relative to the initial interactions of dyads that possessed a low sense of humor (Graham, 1995). Results from the Graham (1995) study also revealed that interpersonal strangers in the high sense of humor group had a stronger desire to engage in future communications with their dyadic partner relative to the interpersonal strangers in the low sense of humor group. Stated differently, it appears that most interpersonal interlocutors favorably perceived humor during initial interaction although it should be noted that perceptual tendencies could potentially vary depending on the investigation.

Perception and Psychological Attributes

One avenue of humor orientation (HO) that is particularly germane to this study involves the role of individual perception. Previous literature by Pennington and Hall (2014) discovered that unfamiliar others could accurately perceive the humor orientation (HO) of another person via examining their Facebook profile for between 10 - 15 minutes. Humor orientation (HO) scholarship on interpersonal dyads by Maki, Booth-Butterfield, and McMullen (2012) claimed that: "perception of HO may be a part of an overall positive relational schema, contributing positive affect which enhances satisfaction and cohesion in ongoing relationships" (p. 661). Organizational scholarship on humor orientation (HO) indicated that subordinate employees appreciated managers who were perceived as being more humorous in nature (Rizzo, Wanzer, & Booth-Butterfield, 1999). Taken together, it appears that individuals prefer to associate with those who are perceived as being humorous whether it is in an interpersonal or organizational context.

The ongoing debate on whether humor orientation (HO) is genetically based or a learned orientation that changes over time is another avenue of scholarship that needs to be highlighted. Humor orientation (HO) research by Wanzer, Sparks, and Frymier (2009) suggested that: "as individuals age, their use of humorous behaviors, including jokes, stories, and anecdotes, differs dramatically from those of younger generations" (p. 134). On the other hand, Wrench and McCroskey (2001) embraced a more critical perspective concerning the fundamental underpinnings of humor orientation (HO) and argued that successfully enacting humor was probably not a learned orientation but instead more of a genetically based trait. Either way, it is imperative to further discuss the role of individual and intrinsic psychological attributes as it represents a central variable of the current study.

The relationship between humorous messages and personality information can be categorized as arbitrary. It was along this line that Cann and Calhoun (2001) found that individuals who seemed to have a good sense of humor were perceived as highly agreeable and less neurotic relative to individuals who appeared to have a below average sense of humor. Communication scholarship by Campbell, Martin, and Wanzer (2001) emphasized that interpersonal perceptions of assertiveness were not positively related to favorable perceptions of a humor orientation (HO). A subsequent study by Kuiper, Grimshaw, Leite, and Kirsh (2004) suggested that a self-defeating sense of humor predicted negative psychological effects related to lower self-esteem, less self-competence, and greater anxiety. Since it appears that various psychological traits can influence humor in an unpredictable manner, additional investigation into humor orientation (HO) and perceived personality attributes is certainly warranted.

The Current Study

The present research examined the variables of interpersonal communication, personality information, and perceptions of humor orientation (HO) at an American university. All of the aforementioned variables of this study are connected in that they influence whether we desire to communicate or not communicate with another person again in the future. The interconnectedness of these variables also helps dictate what type of dyadic communication is appropriate or not appropriate if future conversations eventually transpire. The independent measures of interpersonal communication and personality information and the dependent measure of humor orientation (HO) perceptions are also intrinsically tied together because they collectively help to create an overall cognitive impression that helps us to make sense of another individual.

The central thesis of the current investigation was that positive psychological attributes would make another person appear more humorous while negative psychological attributes would make another person appear less humorous. A positive condition and a negative condition were thereby created for the current research. Communication was present in some of the analyses and not present in other portions of the analyses. The rationale for the current study was to determine if a non-message related variable could influence perceptions of how funny we perceive another individual. The overall structure of this investigation was a pre-test evaluation, distraction task, followed by a post-test evaluation.

Extant communication literature devoted to interpersonal perception and humor has produced consistent results. For example, perception scholarship by Albada, Knapp, and Theune (2002) revealed that positive social interactions induced favorable perceptions of an interpersonal partner while negative social interactions lead to unfavorable perceptions of an interpersonal partner. A similar perceptual investigation by Dix (2013) revealed that a single positive interpersonal communication led to an increase in the perceptions of the physical attractiveness of a dating partner while a single negative interpersonal communication led to a decrease in the perceptions of the physical attractiveness of a dating partner. Separate avenues of interpersonal scholarship that specifically focused on humor claimed that positive humor amongst interpersonal partners resulted in positive outcomes on measures of reduced stress and increased relationship satisfaction (Vela, Booth-Butterfield, Wanzer, & Vallade, 2013). A previous interpersonal study by Bippus (2003) suggested that negative outcomes emerged from

humor being used during a conflict if the message recipient perceived a negative motive was being utilized by the message sender. All things considered, it appears that positive perceptions will lead to positive interpersonal outcomes in a humor relevant context while negative perceptions will lead to negative interpersonal outcomes in a humor relevant context. Therefore, the following hypotheses are being proposed:

H1: Perceptions of humor orientation (HO) will increase after participants are exposed to positive information about the personality of another individual.

H2: Perceptions of humor orientation (HO) will decrease after participants are exposed to negative information about the personality of another individual.

Theory based communication literature has suggested that humor can function on a number of different levels. More specifically, Meyer (2000) contends that humor can produce the positive effects of clarification and identification. At the same time, Meyer (2000) argues that humor can produce the negative effects of enforcement and differentiation. Meyer (2000) summarizes his results by stating: “the paradox of duality in humor functions between unification and division serves to make humor a ‘double-edged sword’ by which communicators can unite or divide their audiences” (p. 329). It is unclear how the duality of humor will affect the current study because scholarship specifically focused on humor orientation (HO) perceptions during initial interaction is sparse. It is conceivable that positive humor orientation (HO) perceptions of another individual will make a communicator feel more united or bonded to an unfamiliar individual. However, it is also possible that positive humor orientation (HO) perceptions of an unfamiliar individual could make a less humorous person feel insecure and thereby create a feeling of division amongst communicators. The effects of negative humor orientation (HO) perceptions after the first interpersonal encounter involving strangers are unknown. The theory-based literature of Meyer (2000) grounds the present research because it illustrates the potentially positive and potentially negative effects of humor. The findings from this study could help ascertain which duality aspect is more salient during the first meeting of strangers. Since the function of communicated humor can lead to varying results, the following research question is being offered:

RQ: What effect will a single interpersonal communication event have on humor orientation (HO) perceptions?

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were undergraduate students at a large southeastern university. A total of 117 ($N = 117$) participants were involved in this investigation. Females ($N = 65$) accounted for 56% of the present sample while males ($N = 52$) accounted for 44% of the present sample. The mean age for study participants was 19.5 years old. Most of the study participants were Caucasian (56%), followed by African American (34%), Hispanic (7%), and Asian (3%). The majority of the participants in this study were freshman (64%) while sophomores (24%), juniors (11%), and seniors (1%) comprised the remainder of the sample. All of the participants in this study were enrolled in either a public speaking course or an interpersonal communication course at the present institution. Course extra credit was awarded to participants in exchange for their involvement with this project.

Instrumentation

The main instrument for this study was a modified version of the humor orientation (HO) scale of Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991). All of the original 17 humor orientation (HO) items of Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) were used in this study. The 17-item measure was minimally altered for the present investigation. Specifically, the seminal reporting of the humor orientation (HO) scale of Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) presented the measure as a self-report scale while this study utilized the measure as an other-report scale. For example, it was in the first reporting of the humor orientation (HO) scale of Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) that the twelfth item was: "People often ask me to tell jokes or stories" (p. 207) whereas the twelfth item for this investigation was: "People often ask the person in the photograph to tell jokes or stories." Similarly, it was in the first reporting of the humor orientation (HO) scale of Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) that the seventeenth item was: "I use humor to communicate in a variety of situations" (p. 207) whereas the seventeenth item for this investigation was: "The person in the photograph can use humor to communicate in a variety of situations." Put simply, the phrase: "the person in the photograph" was substituted for the words "I" or "me" on all of the original 17-items. This modification to all of the original 17-item humor orientation (HO) scale items made the measure other-oriented as opposed to self-oriented. A 7-point Likert response was subsequently applied. Responses ranged from strongly disagree (1) up to strongly agree (7). Reliability analyses for this study indicated that Cronbach's alpha was .85 for the pre-test in the positive condition, was .92 for the post-test in the positive condition, was .86 for the pre-test in the negative condition, and was .91 for the post-test in the negative condition. Thus, a reliable instrument was utilized.

A supplemental instrument that was incorporated into the present research was an open-ended questionnaire that was administered to study participants in the communication present conditions. The aforementioned instrument was supplied to study participants immediately after they completed the humor orientation post-test. The central question instructed participants to offer written commentary on their perceptions of the humor orientation (HO) of the person with whom they just met for social interaction. This form was utilized to ascertain qualitative feedback about humor during an initial interpersonal communication.

Procedures

Several different components constituted the procedural element of this investigation. It should first be noted that four separate conditions were created for the present analysis. The conditions for this study were 1) positive personality information with communication present, 2) positive personality information with no communication present, 3) negative personality information with communication present, and 4) negative personality information with no communication present. The creation of these conditions made it easier to compare and contrast data from the pre-test administration and the post-test administration.

The positive and negative personality information used in this investigation was self-reported data supplied by study participants. Personality information was defined to study participants as factual information about who you are as a unique individual. More specifically, participants were verbally instructed beforehand to reflect on some positive

(albeit general) attributes about their individual character and to reflect on some negative (albeit general) attributes about their individual character. Personality information was intentionally defined in a broad manner because the current research was designed to avoid an overly narrow focus and thereby make the potential findings of this study more appealing to a heterogeneous group of scholars. Utilizing broad self-reported positive personality information and broad self-reported negative personality information was also less taxing on study participants and would later help to determine the overall interconnectedness of personality information and humor orientation (HO). It was before the study began that participants identified the aforesaid positive aspects of their individual personality as well as identified the aforesaid negative aspects of their individual personality. Participants satisfactorily supplied a variety of diverse information about some positive aspects of their personality before the study began and some negative aspects of their personality before the study began. For example, one female participant supplied the following piece of positive information about herself: "I can usually make people smile as soon as they meet me; they don't have to know me. I can make the funniest facial expressions in reactions to things people say and do." In contrast, a different female participant supplied the following piece of negative information about herself: "When people try to play or joke around and I am not in the mood, I will have the worst attitude known to man, it's like another person comes out." It was within two weeks of supplying the self-reported personality data that study participants were given a specific date and time to arrive in person for the next phase of this social experiment.

The following activities occurred when participants arrived in person. Study participants in all conditions were first shown a headshot photograph of another participant. The individual in the headshot photograph was a stranger. The humor orientation (HO) scale of Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) was then placed to the immediate right of the headshot photograph. Participants were subsequently instructed to indicate their perceptions of the humor orientation (HO) of the person in the photograph on the provided seven-point response continuum (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The photograph was visible for the entire pre-test assessment. This analysis represented the pre-test administration for all study participants.

The next procedural element of this study was a distraction activity. The study participants in the communication present conditions engaged in seven minutes of social interaction with the person who was pictured in the photograph during the pre-test administration. Pre-event instructions for the participants in the communication present conditions requested that participants attempt to naturally make their fellow interpersonal partner laugh during their initial interaction. Ensuing discussion in the communication present conditions featured conversation on a variety of different topics. Some of the participants told comical stories, other participants discussed recent events on campus, a couple of participants told jokes, while others shared quirky anecdotes about their family. None of the conversations were scripted to help promote natural dialogue. Conversely, participants in the no communication present conditions completed an unrelated language assessment activity for seven minutes. The task required participants to list words that started with different three letter word prefixes. It is most important to note here that the amount of time for the distraction activity was equal for both conditions. A total of 11 minutes passed for both conditions because of the distraction task, providing final

instructions, and the like. The main objective for the distraction activity was to divert the minds of study participants from their initial pre-test assessment.

The next procedural element of this study was the administration of the post-test. Study participants were shown the exact same headshot photograph that was displayed during the pre-test. The humor orientation (HO) scale of Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) was again placed to the immediate right of the headshot photograph. Participants were again instructed to indicate their perceptions of the humor orientation (HO) of the person in the photograph on the provided seven-point response continuum (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). A reminder to focus on perceptions of the humor orientation (HO) for the person in the photograph was verbally stated and included in the written directions. The photograph was visible for the entire post-test assessment. This analysis represented the post-test administration. It was after the completion of the post-test administration that as a precautionary measure all of the study participants were verbally asked if they knew or had ever met the person in the photograph prior to participating in the present study. There was only one instance where this proved to be the case. The data from that one instance was disregarded and not included in the statistical analyses for this investigation.

The final procedural element that occurred in this study was a manipulation check. Study participants completed the three-item manipulation measure immediately after they completed their individual post-test assessment. The manipulation required study participants to rate the positive self-reported personality information about the person in the photograph or rate the negative self-reported personality information about the person in the photograph on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). The personality information about the person in the photograph focused on either positive personality attributes about the individual character of the person in the photograph or negative personality attributes about the individual character of the person in the photograph. Analyses revealed that the mean for the positive personality information was 5.98 ($sd = 1.16$) while the mean for the negative personality information was 2.68 ($sd = 1.47$). A paired-samples t test found a significant difference between the positive personality condition and the negative personality condition ($t(110) = 14.258, p < .001$). Indeed, participants noticed a significant difference between the positive and the negative.

Data Analyses

The statistical program for the social sciences (SPSS) was used to examine the aforementioned hypotheses and research question. Study hypotheses were tested via a repeated measures ANOVA. The research question was analyzed with a 2 x 2 x 2 mixed factorial ANOVA in which personality information (positive or negative) and communication (present or not present) served as the between subjects factors while administration (pre-test or post-test) was entered as the within subjects factor. Additional analyses such as paired-samples t tests and supplemental factorial ANOVAs were also completed when appropriate.

Results

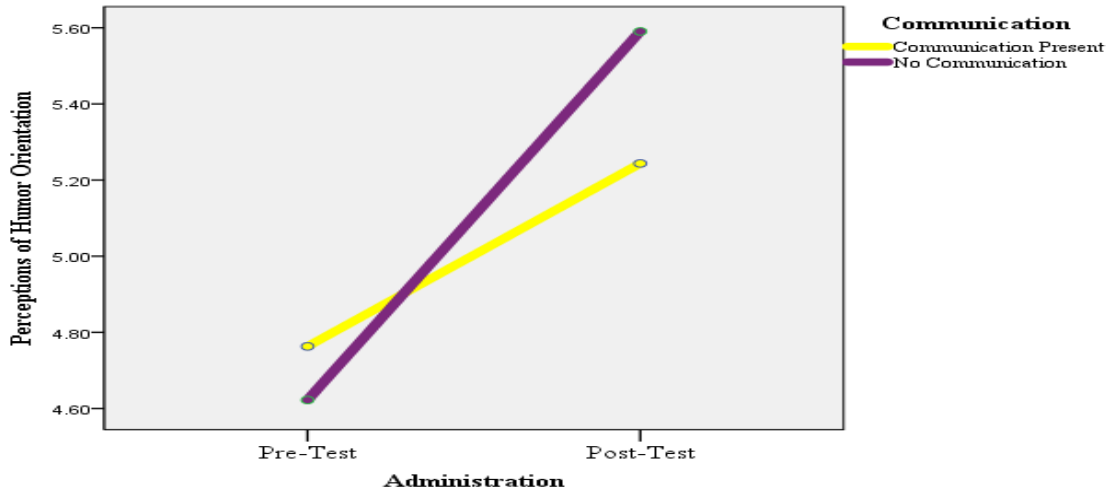
The first study hypothesis surmised that perceptions of humor orientation (HO) would increase after participants were exposed to positive information about the personality of another individual. The repeated measures ANOVA that was conducted yielded support for this hypothesis ($F(1, 60) = 29.251, p < .001$, Partial Eta Squared = .328). It was before the positive personality information was supplied to study participants that pre-test evaluations of the humor orientation (HO) of another person were 4.70 ($sd = 0.67$) on a 7-point response continuum while it was after the positive personality information was supplied to study participants that post-test evaluations of the humor orientation (HO) of another person were 5.39 ($sd = 1.01$) on a 7-point response continuum. Thus, it can be argued that positive personality information about another person can actually make that person seem funnier.

The second study hypothesis suggested that perceptions of humor orientation (HO) would decrease after participants were exposed to negative information about the personality of another individual. Support was found for this hypothesis after the completion of a repeated measures ANOVA ($F(1, 53) = 36.639, p < .001$, Partial Eta Squared = .409). Pre-test perceptions of the humor orientation (HO) of another person were 4.80 ($sd = 0.74$) before negative personality information was supplied while post-test perceptions of the humor orientation (HO) of another person were 3.81 ($sd = 1.15$) after negative personality information was supplied. Therefore, it seems that unflattering information about the personality of another individual can make them appear less humorous.

The research question that was put forth for this study was: What effect will a single interpersonal communication event have on humor orientation (HO) perceptions? A 2 x 2 x 2 mixed factorial ANOVA was calculated on the perceptions of humor orientation (HO) dependent variable in order to test for main effects and interactions. The within subjects main effect for administration (pre-test or post-test) was not significant ($F(1, 110) = 1.631, p = .20$, Partial Eta Squared = .014) and the between subjects main effect for communication (present or not present) was also not statistically significant ($F(1, 110) = .281, p = .60$, Partial Eta Squared = .003). The between subjects main effect for personality condition (positive or negative) did yield statistically significant results ($F(1, 110) = 29.788, p < .001$, Partial Eta Squared = .212). A two-way interaction between administration (pre-test or post-test) and communication (present or not present) was not discovered ($F(1, 110) = 1.892, p = .17$, Partial Eta Squared = .017) and no two-way interaction was discovered between personality condition (positive or negative) and communication (present or not present) in the present investigation ($F(1, 110) = .048, p = .82$, Partial Eta Squared = .000). However, the two-way interaction between administration (pre-test or post-test) and personality condition (positive or negative) was statistically significant ($F(1, 110) = 76.430, p < .001$, Partial Eta Squared = .408). The aforementioned two-way interaction was qualified by a statistically significant three-way interaction (See Figures 1A and 1B; See Table 1) between personality condition (positive or negative), communication (present or not present), and administration (pre-test or post-test) on the perceptions of humor orientation (HO) dependent variable ($F(1, 110) = 15.117, p < .001$, Partial Eta Squared = .120). All things considered, one of the more interesting conclusions that can be drawn based on the data that emerged from the

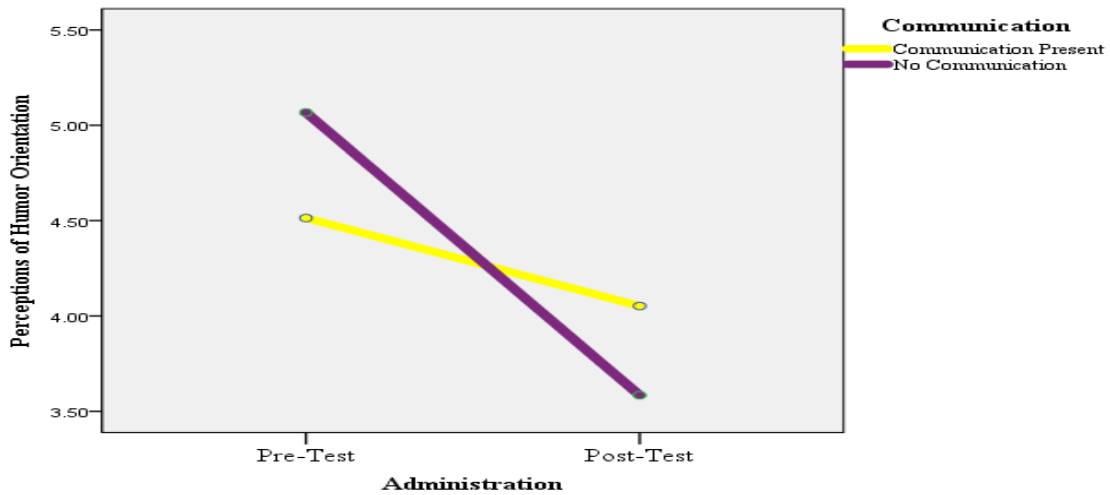
proposed research question was that: communication diminishes the effects of either positive or negative personality information in a humor relevant setting.

Figure 1A: Means for Humor Orientation (HO) Perceptions in the Positive Personality Condition



Three-Way Interaction Plot between Communication, Positive Personality Information, and Administration on Perceptions of Humor Orientation (HO)

Figure 1B: Means for Humor Orientation (HO) Perceptions in the Negative Personality Condition



Three-Way Interaction Plot between Communication, Negative Personality Information, and Administration on Perceptions of Humor Orientation (HO)

Table 1: Means for Interaction between Communication Condition, Personality Information, and Pre-Test

Communication Condition	Personality Information	Administration (Pre-Test/Post-Test)	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication Present	Positive	Pre-Test	4.76	0.70
		Post-Test	5.24	1.04
	Negative	Pre-Test	4.51	0.73
		Post-Test	4.05	1.15
No Communication Present	Positive	Pre-Test	4.62	0.62
		Post-Test	5.59	0.94
	Negative	Pre-Test	5.06	0.66
		Post-Test	3.58	1.11

Supplemental Analyses

Secondary statistical analyses were conducted to examine possible gender differences as well as examine possible differences in class status. The results of the 2 x 2 x 2 mixed factorial ANOVA in which participant gender (male or female) and personality information (positive or negative) were entered as the between subjects factors while pre-test and post-test perceptions of humor orientation (HO) were entered as the within subjects factors did not yield a main effect for gender ($F(1, 110) = .522, p = .472$, Partial Eta Squared = .005). No interactions were found between participant gender and personality information ($F(1, 110) = .189, p = .664$, Partial Eta Squared = .002), nor between participant gender and pre-test/post-test administration ($F(1, 110) = .001, p = .986$, Partial Eta Squared = .000), and a three-way interaction between participant gender, personality information, and pre-test/post-test administration was not discovered ($F(1, 110) = .018, p = .894$, Partial Eta Squared = .000). Similarly, the results of the 2 x 2 x 2 mixed factorial ANOVA in which class status (e.g. freshman, sophomore, etc.) and personality information (positive or negative) were entered as the between subjects factors while pre-test and post-test perceptions of humor orientation (HO) were entered as the within subjects factors did not yield a main effect for class status ($F(4, 110) = 2.442, p = .069$, Partial Eta Squared = .064). No interactions were found between class status and personality information ($F(4, 110) = 1.117, p = .331$, Partial Eta Squared = .020), nor between class status and the pre-test/post-test administration ($F(4, 110) = .508, p = .678$, Partial Eta Squared = .014), and a three-way interaction between class status, personality information, and the pre-test/post-test administration was also not uncovered ($F(4, 110) = .901, p = .409$, Partial Eta Squared = .016).

There is an additional peripheral result that emerged from the qualitative supplemental instrument that should be noted. Several of the study participants in the communication present positive conditions indicated that communication helped establish

a unifying bond with a fellow interlocutor. For example, one of the female participants stated:

My view of his humor did change based on the interaction. Of course, he seemed that he was willing to make me laugh and understand my humor, but he didn't much. However, he did laugh along with me and laughter is contagious.

A similar theme was echoed by another participant who stated: "awkward moment at a point where one of my jokes were possibly too crude but she recovered and adapted quickly, then replied with a slightly crude anecdote that had me smiling and shaking with laughter." Similarly, another participant proclaimed: "she was very funny. She smiled the entire time. I like her bubbly personality. She would make a great laughing buddy!" In short, the central finding that emerged in the written testimonials was support for the theoretical claim that humor serves a unification function as was highlighted in previous research (Meyer, 2000).

Discussion

The present study was completed to determine whether personality information could influence perceptions of humor orientation (HO). Study findings related to the proposed research question yielded a three-way interaction between communication, personality information, and humor orientation (HO) perceptions. Empirical support was also found for the proposed hypotheses. When taken together, a number of interesting discussion points warrant further examination.

One point of discussion that should be examined is related to the first hypothesis that revealed participants increased their post-test ratings of the humor orientation (HO) of another person after positive personality information was supplied about the photographed individual. The support that was uncovered for this hypothesis was in line with previous literature by Cann, Calhoun, and Banks (1997) who found that participants had favorable post-test feelings for message receivers who responded positively to a communicated joke. The aforementioned finding was also in line with prior research by Lewandowski, Aron, and Gee (2007) who reported that participant post-test perceptions of others increased after being exposed to positive personality information about another individual. Positive trait attributes influence our communicative perceptions of a message sender in a favorable manner. This conclusion indicates that if a person is desirous of being seen as funny (whether it be in an interpersonal or larger group setting) that is necessary for she or he to maintain or put out a favorable persona to other individuals. The successful production of humor requires that a message sender possess a humor orientation (HO) skill set but the findings from this study also suggest that humor orientation (HO) is dependent on the psychological observations of the message receiver. Thus, it appears that maintaining a positive persona is important with regard to being perceived as a humorous communicator.

A second point of discussion that is noteworthy of mention is the finding from the second hypothesis that participants decreased their post-test ratings of the humor orientation (HO) of another individual after negative personality information was supplied about the individual in the photograph. It seems that undesirable personality information about another person makes them appear less humorous. Popular evidence of this effect can be taken from notable humorists within the arena of mass communication.

For example, former Tonight Show host Jay Leno experienced a sharp drop from his previous television ratings after he unexpectedly and inauspiciously reclaimed The Tonight Show chair from Conan O'Brien (Piccalo, 2010). The undesirable trait information that surfaced in the media surrounding the debatably seedy efforts that Leno employed to retrieve his old job perhaps resulted in viewers not tuning in because they subsequently perceived Leno as less humorous due to the unflattering information that was disseminated about him to the general public. Similarly, fellow late night extraordinaire David Letterman was perhaps viewed by some viewers as a bit less humorous and a bit more sordid after undesirable trait information emerged surrounding his highly publicized sex scandal. Either way, the findings from this study suggest that negative personality information about a communicator makes them appear less funny.

A third point of discussion that should be noted from the present analysis involves the observed interactions that addressed the proposed research question. The two-way interaction between administration (pre-test or post-test) and personality condition (positive or negative) yielded the largest effect size in the current investigation. This result and the observed effect size were consistent with previous communication and psychology literature that has revealed that positive information regularly interacts with negative information on various dependent variables (e.g. Albada, Knapp, & Theune, 2002; Dix, 2013; Lewandowski, Aron, & Gee, 2007). Perhaps the most noteworthy discussion point for the aforementioned research question is related to the observed three-way interaction between personality condition (positive or negative), communication (present or not present), and administration (pre-test or post-test) on the perceptions of humor orientation (HO) dependent variable. This finding suggests that the effects of either positive or negative personality information are diminished by the presence of communication in a humor relevant setting. Individuals placed more emphasis on their personal observations regarding their communicative outcomes than on the psychological attributes of another individual in this particular humor context. Stated differently, communication is more salient than psychology in the arena of humor orientation (HO). Nevertheless, the observed three-way interaction suggests that communication and psychological attributes are interconnected variables when we make an assessment of how funny (or not funny) we view someone else. The interrelation of these social constructs hints that more interdisciplinary research on the communication variable of humor orientation (HO) would be beneficial.

The final point of discussion that is noteworthy of mention emerged from the qualitative feedback of participants in the communication present conditions. The prevalent theme that humor helped unite communicators was consistent with previous literature by Meyer (2000) and should be further unpacked with a relational lens. That is, the unification finding is intriguing because all of the dyads in the communication present conditions involved strangers who were unfamiliar to one another. While Meyer (2000) utilized a rhetorical lens and political examples to illustrate this function of humor, the findings from this study suggest that humor can create a unifying bond between communicators as early as initial interaction. It appears that humorous messages are a conversational similarity that most interlocutors enjoy during a first meeting. Attempting to display a humor orientation (HO) or be funny is valued when strangers first meet. The qualitative evidence that came to light from this study suggests that unifying or bonding through an appreciation for a humorous joke or anecdote helps reduce uncertainty and

make an initial social interaction feel more comfortable. All things considered, it seems that effectively delivered (yet appropriate) humor bonds communicators at the very onset of social interaction.

Limitations and Future Research

There are some limitations and directions for future research that need to be noted. The major limitation of this study was related to the age of the sample. The mean age of 19.5 years old was rather youthful and their humor orientation (HO) perceptions may not reflect the views of a more heterogeneous age sample. It should also be noted the sample was relatively small and only open to undergraduate students at the affiliated institution. Another limitation that should be discussed is related to the ecological validity of the communication in the communication present conditions. Despite the fact that participants were instructed to act natural and placed in a comfortable location on campus, it seemed that some of the participants in the communication present conditions were trying especially hard to produce humor in a non-organic way during their initial social interaction. This unnaturalness may have marginally and perhaps adversely affected some of the post-test evaluations in the communication present conditions.

Future research into humor orientation (HO) should further explore the concept of interpersonal attraction. While Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (1996) revealed that individuals who possessed a high humor orientation (HO) were more socially attractive, no studies have investigated whether high humor orientation (HO) individuals are seen by others as more physically attractive. It would be interesting to note whether individuals can strategically use humor to make themselves appear more physically attractive in the eyes of a potential romantic partner. Finally, it would be interesting to examine if there are health benefits tied to repeatedly associating with persons who have a high orientation for humor. This line of research could help validate or invalidate the famous adage that laughter is the best medicine.

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