AN EXAMINATION OF THE USE OF DISPARAGEMENT HUMOR IN ONLINE TV COMEDY CLIPS AND THE ROLE OF AUDIENCE REACTION IN ITS EFFECTS

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ABSTRACT

SCOTT PARROTT: An Examination of the Use of Disparagement Humor in Online TV Comedy Clips and the Role of Audience Reaction in its Effects
(Under the direction of Rhonda Gibson)

The dissertation includes two parts, a content analysis and an experiment. In Study 1, coders examined the prevalence and characteristics of disparagement humor in online television clips and its reception by audiences. Disparagement humor appeared in one in four video clips, often targeting physical appearance and weight. Furthermore, studio audiences, other television characters, and online commenters often validated the humorous disparagement of people who are overweight.

Study 2, an experiment, examined the influence of disparaging humor and audience reaction on attitudes concerning weight, self-esteem, enjoyment of the humor, and willingness to share the video content with others. Participants viewed one of four video clips: a control clip, in which an overweight teen plummeted down a slip-and-slide; a clip containing disparagement with no online audience reaction, in which a popular comedian disparaged the overweight teen as the video played in the background; a clip in which the video of the teen and comedian’s commentary was framed by socially validating audience reaction, or positive online viewer reactions posted beneath the video clip; and a clip in which the video of the teen and the comedian’s commentary was framed by socially condemning audience reaction, or negative online viewer reaction posted beneath the video. Several variables significantly predicted enjoyment of the
humor, including how the video was framed, the extent to which viewers identified with the disparager, and viewers’ existing weight-based biases. Importantly, viewers who self-identified as overweight experienced a decrease in self-esteem following exposure to the content. Enjoyment of the video content significantly predicted behavioral intentions, or the self-reported likelihood that the viewer would share the content with acquaintances.
For Caro
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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you fall down an open manhole cover and die.”

Mel Brooks

Humor often contains an interesting duality. While it may amuse audiences, eliciting smiles, positive affect, and laughter, humor also frequently involves an undercurrent of antagonism. Humans enjoy watching people they do not like suffer calamity, to some extent (Wicker, Barron & Willis, 1980). Children snicker when the school bully trips over his untied shoelaces. An online video of an obese teen falling from a swing draws 200,000 views and comments such as “I just knew she was going to eat it.” In one of the world’s oldest documented jokes (Joseph, 2008), the Egyptians poked fun at King Snofru 1,600 years ago by asking, “How do you entertain a bored pharaoh?” (The answer: “Sail a boatload of young women dressed only in fishing nets down the Nile - and urge the pharaoh to go fishing”). Laughter at someone else’s expense has interested scholars for centuries. In ancient Greece, philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle noted the derogatory vein coursing through humor. It continues to interest social scientists, including Zillmann and Bryant (1991), who noted that much of comedy “can be construed as an aggregation of miniature plots in which some persons or groups
triumph over others, and in which these others are debased, demeaned, disparaged, ridiculed, humiliated, or otherwise subjected to undesirable experiences” (p. 270).

Such comedy is often referred to as disparagement humor. Disparagement is conceptually defined here as communication in which a person or group (the disparager) insults another person or group (the target) on the basis of characteristics such as race, gender, sexuality, income, age, religion, health, and physical appearance. In disparagement humor, ridicule is masked with non-tendentious joke elements such as wordplay, turns of phrase, and/or exaggeration (Martin, 2007). While often delivered in jest, disparagement humor can carry significant social and psychological consequences. It involves aggressive communication that may influence the emotions and cognition of the person telling the joke (Hobden & Olson, 1994), the person hearing the joke (Ford, 2000), and the person whose group is the target of the joke (Eisenberg, Berge, Fulkerson & Neumark-Sztainer, 2011). When audience members witness the disparagement of someone they dislike, they may experience a boost in self-esteem (Zillmann & Cantor, 1972). Existing research has examined – with conflicting results – whether disparagement humor reinforces existing stereotypes about marginalized groups and influences subsequent perceptions and social interactions (Ford & Ferguson, 2004; Olson, Maio, and Hobden, 1999). Additionally, researchers have addressed how the conversational levity of humor may render disparagement socially acceptable for certain audience members (Ford & Ferguson, 2004). However, previous research has examined humor in an isolated context, where the person hearing the joke makes his/her own assessment of the quality of the joke without outside influences. The project expands the existing literature, helping us understand the presence of disparagement humor in TV clips found on the Internet and
how the humor may interact with audience reactions to nurture stereotypes, prejudice, and stigmatizing behavior. The project introduces the idea that disparagement humor effects may differ within a social context, in which other audience members’ reactions inform and potentially alter the reaction of the target listener. It also examines the question: how often do characters actually insult one another in online television clips, and what characteristics most often serve as fodder for disparagement?

In addition to informing theory, the project will be significant for practical reasons. Disparagement humor is a form of comedy, the most popular genre in American media entertainment (King, 2003). Many highly viewed television programs are comedic, including situation comedies (Two and a Half Men), stand-up based humor (Tosh.0), and adult animation (Family Guy). Comedy is especially popular among adolescents and young adults, who may be particularly vulnerable to the subtle and overt influences of media messages. In 2011, three of the 10 most popular television programs among adults 18 to 49 were comedies: Modern Family (No. 3, 7.1 million viewers); Big Bang Theory (No. 6, 7 million viewers); and Two Broke Girls (No. 9, 5.5 million viewers; Andreeva, 2012). Comedies were the second most popular genre in the top 10, falling behind only song/dance competitions, which had four of the top 10 programs, including American Idol (No. 2, 7.8 million viewers) and The Voice (No. 3, 7.8 million viewers).

Through the Internet and social media, audiences are being exposed to comedic television content and other mass media messages in more ways than ever before. Increasingly, viewers are watching video content on hand-held devices (such as i-Phones), laptop computers, and other portable devices (Nielsen, 2011a). Television remains the most popular medium for TV/video viewing, with 288 million Americans
tuning in to video content through the traditional set (Nielsen, 2011b). However, the number of Americans who are watching TV/video content on the Internet is increasing, recently topping 143 million (Nielsen, 2011b). While the television “cord isn’t cut,” the viewing experience is certainly not confined to the living room any more (Perryman, 2011). Television networks are adapting to the transition, as demonstrated by the fact that TV websites represent four of the top 5 channels for mobile video in terms of unique viewers (Nielsen, 2011b). While YouTube consistently attracts the most unique viewers, the websites for Fox, ABC, Comedy Central, and CBS draw enough viewers to rank among the top 5 sites for mobile video (Nielsen, 2011b).

Equally important, online television allows viewers to become a more active audience. The Internet provides audience members a myriad of ways to exert influence over the opinions of others concerning media content, issues, events, and even other people. American Internet users spend a significant amount of time on sites through which they may share opinions and video content, including 53 million minutes on Facebook in May 2011, 723,793 minutes on Blogger, and 565,156 minutes on Twitter (Nielsen, 2011a). Nearly 80 percent (4 in 5) of active Internet users visit social media websites, and 40 percent of social media users access content from their mobile phone (Nielsen, 2011a). The websites for major television networks, including NBC, ABC, CBS and Comedy Central, allow viewers to “like” videos, share programming through social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter, and to post comments concerning video content and the site itself. As Nielsen researchers noted, “Consumers frequently trust the recommendations of their peers, making social media an ideal platform for influencers to spread their ideas and purchase power” (2011a, p. 10). While the Nielsen report focused
on consumer persuasion, we may also expect that the messages we encounter on the Internet, including those produced by major media outlets and online commenters, may influence the way we perceive others. Anecdotally, when the author recently asked a group of college students what they do when no one “likes” their posts on Facebook, the answer was unanimous: delete the post. “If no one likes it, then you look dumb,” one student said. Conversely, the students agreed that they feel wonderful when people quickly “like” their commentary. Essentially, “likes” and commentary communicate information concerning which opinions and behaviors are (or are not) socially acceptable. This idea is at the heart of this research project. Disparagement humor balances a line between being politically incorrect and socially acceptable, and its reception by an individual audience member may be influenced by environmental cues including other audience members (Whitley & Kite, 2010). In essence, the conversational levity inherent in humor may communicate that prejudiced comments are permissible in that specific context, because the humorist is “only joking” (Ford & Ferguson, 2004). Audience reaction can dramatically change the context. While laughter may communicate that the humor is acceptable, condemnation may convey an entirely different message. Therefore, audience response potentially influences whether the beliefs, attitudes, and even prejudice expressed in humor are acceptable, which may in turn influence a viewer’s processing of the content.

Despite its popularity, comedic television programming has been the subject of few content analyses (especially compared to violence and sex), and the author knows of no recent research that has specifically examined the presence of disparagement humor in American television programming, whether it’s aired via the traditional medium or
online. Judging by the popularity and potential influence of the genre, the gap in the existing literature is significant. This project will attempt to expand our understanding of disparaging comedy through a mixed-method approach involving two studies. Study 1, a content analysis, will examine the prevalence and content of disparagement humor in online TV videos, and how it is framed using validating or condemning audience reaction. Study 2, an experiment, will examine the influence of disparagement humor and audience reactions on viewers’ self-esteem, enjoyment, and attitudes toward the targeted group. The research will test key premises underlying traditional theories of disparagement humor. Namely, Study 2 will examine the long-held assumption that people experience increases in self-esteem through the belittlement of other people who are different. Perhaps most important, the research expands on existing theoretical approaches by empirically testing the role of social influence in the enjoyment and attitude-based effects of disparagement humor.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Theories of disparagement humor

When communicated via mass media, disparagement humor has the potential to reach millions of audience members. How these audience members interpret and appreciate disparagement has been a subject of investigation for humor theorists for centuries. Nevertheless, three theories inform much of the modern research into disparagement humor: the disposition theory of disparagement humor (Zillmann & Cantor, 1976), the misattribution theory of tendentious humor (Zillmann & Bryant, 1980), and prejudiced norm theory (Ford & Ferguson, 2004). The theories help explain the reason people enjoy disparagement humor, and how disparagement humor may nurture negative perceptions of other people based on social categories. They share common assumptions, including the idea that people enjoy disparagement humor because it makes them feel superior to people they dislike and boosts their self-esteem. Indeed, research in social psychology supports the proposition that an individual would experience self-esteem boost following the ridicule of a person who belongs to an out-group. Social psychological research indicates that individuals experience a boost in self-esteem (or repair to threatened self-esteem) through the derogation and “looking down” of others. For example, Fein and Spencer (1997) conducted a series of studies in which they found that people who experienced self-esteem threat were more likely to
stereotype. They also experienced a boost in self-esteem after stereotyping another individual.

The disposition, misattribution, and prejudiced norm theories build on the work of researchers such as Wolff, Smith, and Murray (1934), who examined the response of Jewish audience members to jokes told (a) about Jews by Gentiles and (b) about Gentiles by Jews. As hypothesized, Wolff and colleagues found that Jewish audience members experienced greater mirth when a member of their in-group (a Jew) insulted an out-group member (a Gentile). When an outsider disparaged a member of their own group (i.e., Gentiles joking about Jews), the Jewish audience members reported less amusement. Twenty-five years later, Middleton (1959) replicated the study with black and white audience members. The results were similar. White audience members reported greater enjoyment of jokes in which a white person insulted a black person. Furthermore, black audience members experienced greater mirth when a black person disparaged a white person. However, an important exception appeared in the 1959 study. Middle-class black audience members actually enjoyed humor in which whites disparaged blacks. Informed by the conflicting results, Zillmann and Cantor (1972) hypothesized that the enjoyment of disparagement humor had less to do with group membership and more to do with attitudes or dispositions toward the particular groups. The researchers examined the hypothesis by measuring participants’ existing dispositions toward the humorist and target involved in disparagement humor. As hypothesized, they discovered that audiences experienced greater mirth when they held negative dispositions toward the target of disparagement humor and positive dispositions toward the disparager. Zillmann and Cantor advanced the conceptual explanation in 1976, when they proposed and provided
empirical support for the disposition theory of disparagement humor. In essence, the theory proposes that people enjoy seeing good things happen to individuals they consider to be good people, and bad things happen to individuals they consider to be bad people (to an extent). Rather than simple group belonging, audience members experience mirth in reaction to existing dispositions toward (a) the target and (b) the communicator of disparagement humor. The disposition theory of disparagement humor offers four predictions. First, an audience member will experience greater mirth when he/she dislikes the target of the humor. Second, an audience member will experience less mirth when he/she likes the disparaged target. Third, an audience member will report greater enjoyment when he/she likes the joke communicator (the disparager). Finally, an audience member will experience less enjoyment when he/she dislikes the joke communicator. Overall, the theory predicts that audience members will experience the greatest amount of mirth when they (a) strongly like the joke communicator and (b) strongly dislike the disparaged target. Zillmann and Cantor (1976) found empirical support for the theory when they examined audience dispositions toward professors/students and employers/employees, and audience reactions to disparagement humor involving the groups. While the disposition theory is helpful in explaining audience enjoyment of disparagement humor, it involves at least one limitation. People enjoy the disparagement of reviled others to a certain extent. When disparagement humor becomes extremely harsh or hostile, participants report less amusement. The findings raised the question: why?

Zillmann and Bryant (1980) proposed an explanation in the misattribution theory of tendentious humor. The theory builds on work by Freud (1960), who proposed that
comedic communication often involves two elements: tendentious and non-tendentious. Non-tendentious humor elements involve innocent joke work, such as turns of phrases, word play, and exaggeration. It does not involve the insult or ridicule of a target. Conversely, tendentious humor involves aggression and hostility, including the direct disparagement of another person, group, or target. The theorists proposed that the appreciation of aggressive humor depends heavily on the presence of innocent elements. According to Zillmann and Bryant (1980), word play, exaggeration, and other non-tendentious elements provide audience members an excuse for violating social norms and enjoying the disparagement and/or open ridicule of another person.

Disparagement & Social Norms

Social norms are implicitly agreed upon rules of social conduct outside of laws, and a violation of dominant social norms can translate into social exclusion or even open ridicule and condemnation for an individual (Crandall & Stangor, 2005). Therefore, an audience member may experience pleasure internally while witnessing an enemy disparaged, but he/she may not openly express enjoyment because it would violate prevailing social norms (Zillmann & Bryant, 1980). When non-tendentious elements appear in joke work, they provide audience members an alternative explanation for the pleasure they experience while witnessing the debasement of a despised other. For example, a sexist male who hears a derogatory joke about women can say, “Oh, it’s how the comedian made the comment that was so funny,” rather than openly admitting to himself and/or others that he found the debasement of a woman appealing. Audience members “misattribute” the reason they enjoy humor to non-tendentious elements when they experience mirth after witnessing the disparagement of a disliked other. Importantly,
misattribution may occur automatically and without the conscious awareness of audience members. To test the hypothesis, Zillmann and Bryant (1980) manipulated the mood of participants by having a female confederate experimenter either insult or welcome participants shortly after their arrival to a research study. As participants watched via video, the confederate walked into another room where she spilled hot tea over her lab coat either (a) after a jack-in-the-box opened, frightening her or (b) without the non-tendentious humor element of the jack-in-the-box. Audience members self-reported the greatest mirth when they (a) disliked the experimenter and (b) witnessed her spill the tea in the presence of the humorous element. While the research helps explain audience enjoyment of tendentious humor, it contains at least one limitation: it does not explain how disparagement humor may influence audience members’ attitudes and perceptions of others, namely the target of the communication.

_Disparagement, Stereotypes & Prejudice_

Research examining the influence of disparagement humor on the formation and reinforcement of stereotypes and prejudice has produced mixed results. While researchers expected disparagement humor would make stereotypes more readily accessible in memory through priming, the existing research has not provided clear empirical evidence. Researchers have differentiated between (a) exposure to and (b) communication of disparagement humor. For example, Hobden and Olson (1994) found that participants who read aloud jokes about lawyers reported more negative attitudes toward attorneys afterward. Similarly, Maio, Olson and Bush (1997) found that Canadians who read disparaging jokes about Newfoundlanders (the Canadian equivalent of the Southern American stereotype) subsequently reported more stereotypical attitudes
toward Newfoundlanders. While research demonstrates the influence of telling disparaging jokes, similar results have not been found when it comes to exposure to the comedic ridicule of others. In three studies, Olson, Maio, and Hobden (1999) examined whether exposure to disparagement humor influenced attitudes toward the social groups targeted by the humor. The studies reported a “null” finding, and the authors concluded that exposure to disparagement humor does not significantly influence the formation or accessibility of stereotypes concerning the groups targeted by the humor. The research contained limitations, however. First, the authors failed to take into account pre-existing attitudes toward the groups that were targeted by the humor. Furthermore, and perhaps more important, the humor targeted two high-power social groups in American society: men and attorneys. The experimental design will help remedy the limitation.

In addition to individual effects, researchers have examined macro-social effects of disparagement humor through the prejudiced norm theory, the third and final theory addressed here. The prejudiced norm theory (Ford & Ferguson, 2004) builds off the disparagement humor work of Zillmann and colleagues, as well as the social influence work of Robert Cialdini (see Cialdini, 1993) and other researchers. The theory makes four predictions. First, humorous communication activates a conversational rule of levity, which advances a normative standard that the recipient should not take the disparagement humor seriously. In essence, the conversational rule of levity informs the recipient that “This is only a joke.” Second, the message recipient tacitly agrees to the normative standard that, in light of the circumstances, discrimination against the targeted group should not be taken seriously. Third, the message recipient uses the normative standard for self-regulation, such that the individual will demonstrate greater tolerance of
prejudice and discrimination outside the joke environment. Finally, the message recipients’ pre-existing attitudes toward the target group influence the extent to which the humor is considered socially appropriate and enjoyable. A series of studies has demonstrated support for the theory. For example, Ford (2000) exposed participants to (a) disparagement humor, (b) non-humorous disparaging statements or (c) neutral humor, and then asked participants to read a short story in which a male supervisor acted in a sexist manner toward a new female employee. In the vignette, the male employer referred to the female employee using inappropriate nicknames and implied that she would not perform up to par because of her gender. After reading the vignette, participants indicated the extent to which they would criticize the supervisor’s behavior. Male participants who were exposed to the sexist disparagement humor demonstrated the most tolerance for the supervisor’s behavior. In a related study, Ford and colleagues (2001) categorized participants as high or low in hostile sexism and then asked them to read the vignette in which the male supervisor mistreated the female employee. While participants read the vignette, they also imagined how guilty they would feel if they were in the supervisor’s shoes and behaving the same way. In the end, sexist participants who had been exposed to disparagement humor reported the lowest expectation of remorse. Additional research has examined how exposure to disparagement humor might influence behavior. For example, Ford, Boxer, Armstrong, and Edel (2008) reported an association between exposure to sexist disparagement humor and a decreased likelihood of financially contributing to women’s organizations. Romero-Sánchez, Durán, Carretero-Dios, Megias, and Moya (2010) found that compared to non-sexist and control group participants, sexist male participants who were exposed to disparagement humor...
demonstrated increased rape proclivity. Rape proclivity is the self-reported likelihood participants would commit a rape if they were assured they had no fear of punishment. While prejudiced norm theory informed a revealing – and at times shocking – line of research, it does contain limitations. First, the theory does not address the influence of disparagement humor on existing attitudes toward targeted individuals or groups. More important, it shares a limitation that is common to all the theories outlined here. In research for all three theories, social scientists exposed participants to either printed cartoons or written jokes. The approach is divorced from real-world exposure to humorous content, which becomes especially problematic when one takes into account the significant and well-documented influence of social norms on attitude and behavioral regulation. As noted, people rarely encounter disparagement humor in isolated contexts. Rather, fellow audience members are present, potentially influencing how the individual will interpret the humorous communication. This research seeks to fill the gap, beginning with a content analysis that investigates disparagement humor and viewer reaction in online television comedies.

Conformity

When people watch comedic television programming or hear jokes during conversations, they are not an isolated audience. Rather, additional audience members are often present. This even occurs when an individual is watching television alone, because program producers often take advantage of the conforming influence of canned applause and laughter (Cialdini, 1993). Through their behavior and commentary, both live and “canned” audience members communicate norms or messages about the attitudes and behaviors of other people, and how one might be expected to think or behave in a given
situation. Norms potentially influence the extent to which an individual audience member demonstrates pleasure upon hearing disparaging jokes through conformity, which is the subject of this research. Conformity occurs when an individual shifts his/her own opinion to match the opinion of others (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). People may conform for several reasons, including informational purposes or fear of social recrimination (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004), and most often the shift in attitude or behavior is based on normative information. Scholars distinguish between two types of normative information: injunctive and descriptive (Cialdini, Reno & Kallgren, 1990). Injunctive norms signal how one should behave, while descriptive norms essentially inform an individual how everyone else would behave in the given situation. Norms serve several functions. For example, when an individual encounters an ambiguous situation, or one in which he/she is unsure how to act, the individual may model his/her behavior after the actions of others. In essence, the communicated norm serves a knowledge function (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004), because we assume if most other people are behaving a certain way it is probably correct. When an individual notices that his or her personal views may conflict with the prevalent norm, he or she may conform in order to maintain a likeable appearance, promote social cohesion, or simply develop what seems like an accurate attitude (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Scholars of both mass communications and social psychology have found that norms are powerful, and that conformity may influence both the way in which people perceive media content and other people (Janes & Olson, 2000; Martin & Gray, 1996). As Cialdini noted in 1993, television producers trust in the powerful influence of canned laughter and studio applause not based on a whim, but because they understand research. Media effects research has in fact shown that audience members who hear
laughter find mediated content funnier when compared to participants in a control condition who heard no laughter. When Martin and Gray (1996) exposed college students to radio-show comedy accompanied by audience laughter (or not), they found that listeners who heard laughter found the show funnier and more enjoyable. They also laughed and smiled more than listeners who heard the show without audience laughter. The study expanded on previous work by Smyth and Fuller (1972) and Fuller and Sheehy-Skeffington (1974), who found that humorous recordings elicited longer and more frequent laughter from listeners when they included dubbed laughter.

Disparagement humor itself may also elicit conformity, as Janes and Olson (2000) found when they asked participants to watch videotapes in which someone ridiculed another person, ridiculed himself, or told innocent jokes. When participants watched the comedian insult someone else, they were more likely to conform to the majority opinion when asked to rate the funniness of an unrelated cartoon strip or the disparagement video itself. However, the normative influence of laughter (or condemnation) on perceptions of disparagement humor and disparaged targets has not been examined in tandem. This represents a significant gap in the literature, especially when one considers the prominent role of conformity in prejudice and discrimination.

Conformity, Stereotypes, Prejudice & Discrimination

While Gordon Allport (1954) blamed conformity for half of all discrimination, some modern researchers say the renowned social psychologist may have underestimated its power. As Crandall and Stangor (2005) wrote, “conformity in matters of prejudice is not occasional, and is probably not to blame for merely half of all prejudices, but instead seems to form the very core of the majority of people’s prejudices” (p. 305). Researchers
have repeatedly demonstrated that normative information and conformity do influence the extent to which people consider prejudice and discrimination socially acceptable, as well as the likelihood they will demonstrate prejudice and discrimination (Ford & Ferguson, 2004; Crandall, Eshleman, & O’Brien, 2002; Stangor, Sechrist & Jost, 2001). For example, Crandall, Eshleman, and O’Brien (2002) found a strong correlation (r = .96) between college students’ self-reported attitudes toward stereotyped groups and the extent to which they felt the prejudice would be accepted by society. Meanwhile, researchers also found that normative information influences the extent to which people endorse (or condemn) anti-racism policies (Blanchard, Crandall, Brigham & Vaughan, 1994) and stereotypes about African Americans (Stangor, Sechrist & Jost, 2001). Norms may be transmitted through several routes, including interpersonal interaction, cultural institutions, and the focus of the present study: the media. Disparagement humor certainly involves interpersonal interaction (joker addressing audience, audience responding), and it may communicate normative information about the acceptability of prejudice through its content, conversational levity (Ford & Ferguson, 2004), and the way in which it is framed by audience responses. While applause and laughter may frame disparagement humor as socially acceptable, boos, sidelong glances from other characters and negative commentary about the content may frame the humor in quite the opposite manner. Online television, with its studio audiences and online viewer commentary, certainly presents an opportunity to examine the moderating influence of audience response on the internalization of disparagement humor. Therefore, the present research begins with a content analysis examining the prevalence and characteristics of disparagement humor in online television clips, including audience reaction. The results will inform Study 2, an
experiment designed to examine the influence of disparagement humor – and audience reaction – on viewer attitudes toward disparaged groups.
Chapter 3: Study 1 Overview

Overview

In Study 1, two coders documented the prevalence and characteristics of disparagement humor in 645 video clips posted on the websites of NBC, ABC, CBS, Fox, and Comedy Central between October 2012 and February 2013. Characters frequently disparaged one another, and the derisive comments often received social validation from studio audiences, other characters, and online commenters. The content analysis draws on the framing approach of mass communications to help explain how television portrayals and audience reaction may reinforce or mitigate disparagement humor by ignoring or highlighting certain information.

Frames & Disparagement Humor

Frames may make information in communicating texts more salient for audience members (Entman, 1993), influencing the way individuals perceive an issue, event or other people. This content analysis examined the information contained in online TV disparagement humor and how two specific frames – social validation and social condemnation – may make the derogation of another individual more (or less) salient. This study’s approach is novel. While many content analyses use the framing approach to better understand how professional content producers frame topics, this study examined frames that are crafted through both professional and viewer input. When people watch television, they encounter frames carefully crafted by media professionals (for the most part). However, the frame may change when accompanied by viewer commentary online.
The scriptwriter or director no longer determines the frame alone. Rather, an active audience may exert control, challenging or reinforcing information and potentially altering the frame crafted by the media professional.

While framing has informed research in political science, mass communications, public health, and other disciplines, its roots may be traced back to psychology and sociology. Goffman (1974) proposed that people use cognitive shortcuts called schema - or primary frameworks - that are based on stereotypes to help make sense of the world around them. From a communication standpoint, both the communicator and audience rely on schema to produce and process information. For example, journalists regularly shape large amounts of information into content that is both accessible and understandable for the audience. The task represents “frame building,” an early step in the process model of framing outlined by Scheufele (1999). Content producers craft media frames, which may in turn influence audience frames via frame setting and ultimately shape attitudes, attributions, and behaviors (Scheufele, 1999). The psychological lineage of framing may be traced to the work of Kahneman and Tversky (1981), who showed that an alteration in the way a scenario is framed can influence how people perceive and address a problem. Chong and Druckman (2007) noted a similar finding, saying the "major premise of framing theory is that an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and be construed as having implications for multiple values or considerations" (p. 104). Frames "are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Disparagement humor inherently relies on stereotyped images and stock phrases, because
it enables “the listener to resolve an incongruity and ‘get’ the joke” (Martin, 2007, p. 139). Martin provides the following joke as an example:

Q: How do you make a Scotsman mute and deaf?

A: By asking him to contribute to a charity.

Martin notes:

To resolve the puzzle of why someone would suddenly become mute and deaf when asked to contribute money to a charity, one needs to be aware of the English stereotype of Scottish people being excessively stingy (p. 140).

Additionally, frames make information "more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences" (Entman, 1993, p. 53). While content analyses of disparagement humor are lacking, scholars have analyzed ways in which comedic television content increases (or decreases) the salience of information concerning minorities. Situation comedies in the United States frequently provide the general public an inaccurate estimate of the number of people who are homosexual, senior adults, or overweight in the United States (Fouts & Inch, 2005; Fouts & Burggraf, 2000). Content analysts have also found correlations between the frequency of negative comments and the weight of female characters in situation comedies (Fouts & Burggraf, 2000). Nevertheless, researchers have not examined the potential functions served by frames in disparagement humor. Frames perform four functions in a communicating text: they (1) define problems, (2) diagnose causes, (3) make moral judgments, and (4) suggest remedies (Entman, 1993). As mentioned, this content analysis examines two frames in particular – social validation and social condemnation – in online disparagement humor. Audience reaction distinguishes the frames. In the social validation frame, audience members condone character remarks and behavior through supportive commentary. In
other words, viewers may write “LOL” (laugh out loud) or “This is hilarious!” beneath an online video in which a stand-up comedian insults someone based on race. Conversely, the *social condemnation* frame predominantly involves negative commentary. For example, online viewers may write “This is horrible,” or “This is completely inappropriate,” beneath the racist joke. Since viewer commentary accompanies online TV content, it may act in much the same fashion as pre-recorded audience reaction, which has been shown to influence viewers’ opinions about television shows. Pre-recorded audience reaction, including canned laughter, studio applause and character response, provides “societal context in which comments made by individual members of that society are supported,” and may provide “implicit societal approval” for disparaging remarks about individual characteristics such as body weight (Fouts & Burggraf, 2000; p. 927). Audience reaction may also serve as a type of “reinforcement of reinforcement,” potentially increasing the likelihood at-home audience members will replicate the behavior of television characters through social learning (Fouts & Burggraf, 2000; p. 927). Social learning, or social cognitive theory of mass communication, assumes that people may learn through the example of others, including television characters. When the actions or opinions of others are rewarded, the onlooker will be more likely to personally replicate the opinion or behavior because it elicited positive consequences. Conversely, negative consequences should lead an onlooker to avoid copying the behavior or attitude. In an analysis of 18 prime-time situation comedies in 1997, researchers found that 80 percent of negative comments that male characters made about female characters’ body shapes were followed by audience reactions (Fouts & Burggraf, 2000), though the authors did not specify whether the audience condemned or validated
the remarks. This project expands on the work, examining a novel, immediate, and more explicit form of audience reaction: viewer commentary. It is the first to examine the functions of frames in the context of disparagement humor, to the author’s knowledge.

In disparagement humor, the frames may perform all four functions outlined by Entman (1993). By definition, disparagement humor involves the ridicule of one party by another in a comedic context. Therefore, a problem is inherent: the underlying conflict between disparager and target (Function No. 1). However, the social validation and social condemnation frames may diverge on the remaining functions. While they define a common problem, the frames may offer different diagnoses of the cause (Function No. 2). The social validation frame implicitly blames the target for the conflict, while social condemnation shifts the blame to the disparager. For example, when the comedian Daniel Tosh insults an overweight man and viewers applaud the video online, the social validation frame communicates to viewers that the target—not the comedian—should be viewed in a negative light. In other words, the target would not be subjected to ridicule if he lost weight. Social condemnation should communicate an entirely different message, suggesting the comedian acted rudely, harshly, or otherwise inappropriately. Meanwhile, the social validation and social condemnation frames may also communicate entirely different moral judgments (Function No. 3). Audience condemnation of disparagement humor may communicate a norm to home viewers in which it is morally unacceptable to make fun of another person on the basis of weight, race, gender, and other characteristics. Conversely, audience applause may signal to viewers that it is morally acceptable to insult another person in a humorous context. Finally, the frames may suggest different remedies (Function No. 4). When the audience condemns the humorous disparagement of
another person, the frame suggests the comedian should not repeat the unacceptable behavior. Audience applause may suggest that the remedy lay in the target’s assimilation (i.e., an overweight person should lose weight). Of course, the potential functions of social validation and social condemnation frames are merely conjecture without empirical evidence. Therefore, the content analysis in Study 1 examines the presence and absence of disparagement humor and frames, while the experimental design in Study 2 investigates the proposed functions served by the frames. The content analysis begins by documenting disparagement humor in online television clips, providing the foundation for an analysis of viewer response. Since the content analysis is exploratory, it advances research questions rather than hypothesis. It first asks:

RQ1: What is the prevalence of disparagement humor in television clips posted on the websites of comedic programs on CBS, NBC, ABC, Fox, and Comedy Central between October 2012 and February 2013?

It is important to study these programs for at least three reasons. First, comedic television should demonstrate the greatest likelihood of containing disparagement humor. Second, comedy is a popular genre of American television (both traditional and online), as the viewership figures indicate. Third, college students — the subjects of Study 2 — frequently view comedic television, yet it is understudied in comparison to dramatic and crime-based programming. Online clips are 2-to 3-minute segments chosen by television producers to represent the most humorous elements of episodes, which are generally between 20 and 30 minutes long. The study examines clips, rather than episodes, for several reasons. While the websites often provide viewers access to two or three current episodes for streaming, they generally provide several dozen clips representing a variety
of episodes across seasons. Some sites do not provide full episodes, but they do provide clips. Most important, the short nature of clips allows viewers to easily share content with friends, family, co-workers and other people through email and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Certainly, the temporal nature and sheer quantity of Internet content present challenges for the quantitative content analyst. The focus on television clips helped narrow the population of content to study, thereby producing a more efficient design. Finally, clips are consistently significant in terms of viewership. In other words, we can be assured that each content unit reached a large audience, and likely informed viewers using both the traditional medium of television and newer technology such as hand-held devices. While homemade videos certainly go viral and reach millions on sites such as YouTube, the reach of such self-produced content is less consistent. In other words, one homemade video may reach 1 million people, while another reaches 10.

In addition to the prevalence of disparagement humor, the author is interested in the characteristics of the person who made the joke and the person targeted by the ridicule. Media content may be a reflection of society, and it may also inform society. The messages communicated implicitly by media content are important. When someone thin insults someone fat, a value-laden message may be communicated. Therefore, the study asks:

RQ2: Who is targeted by disparagement humor in the online content?

and,

RQ3: Who does the disparaging?

Since humorous insults may insult more than physical appearance, such as race, age, and weight, the author is also interested in the actual topic of disparagement jokes.
For example, an overweight person may be subjected to ridicule for intelligence rather than body shape. Therefore, the study asks the following:

RQ4: What is the topic of disparagement?

As noted, the way in which the disparagement humor is framed by social validation or social condemnation may dramatically alter the audience’s interpretation of the content. Framing has received criticism for being too subjective. Therefore, the content analysis follows the “list of frames” method for framing analysis outlined by Tankard (2001). Using the approach, coders follow a list of keywords, symbols and other individual indicators to determine the presence of particular frames. The next research questions presented here, then, address individual aspects of the overall frames of social validation and social condemnation, as well as the overall frame for video clips contained in disparagement humor.

RQ5: How do (a) studio audiences, (b) characters and (c) online viewers respond to disparagement humor in the online video clips?

RQ6: What’s the overall frame for the disparagement humor?
Chapter 4: Study 1 Methodology

Sample

To examine the research questions, coders rated comedic television clips posted on the CBS, NBC, ABC, Fox, and Comedy Central websites between October 2012 and February 2013. A program was selected for analysis when it appeared to meet the Oxford English Dictionary definition of comedy, being “characterized by its humorous or satirical tone and its depiction of amusing people or incidents, in which the characters ultimately triumph over adversity” (Comedy, 2013). The time frame was selected because October marks the beginning of the fall television season in the United States. Coders rated clips from 31 television programs, which are listed in Table 1 and accompanied by the network on which they aired, viewership averages (when available), and the number of clips coded in the present analysis.

< TABLE 1 HERE >

Coders examined 645 clips. While the content analysis attempted to examine every comedic television clip posted on the specific program sites during the fall television season, the author is hesitant to label the study a census because of the temporal nature of the Internet. Content changes quickly and drastically. While an analyst may have examined every content unit by the conclusion of Monday, he/she may return Tuesday and discover only a sample of the topic has been examined or that much of the content from Monday has been replaced. Therefore, the generalizability of the study is
limited. Nevertheless, the sample provides an important glimpse into online television content and the opinions expressed by viewers.

Networks differed in the frequency with which they posted television clips online. More clips came from NBC, CBS, and Fox because the networks (a) air more comedic television programs, and (b) post more video clips. The numbers follow: CBS (130 clips); NBC (167 clips); ABC (59 clips); Fox (177 clips) and Comedy Central (127 clips). While disparities emerged in the number of clips for each title, the sample offers an accurate portrait of online comedic television content from the time period.

Units of Analysis

The study examined two units of analysis: clips and disparagement jokes. Clips were defined as 2- to 3-minute segments from comedic television programs posted on the websites. A disparagement joke is an individual instance of communication in which a person or group (the disparager) jokingly insulted a person or group (the target) on the basis of social status. Previous content analyses (Long and Graesser, 1988) used audience laughter as an indication that a joke had occurred in the television show. Such an approach was invalid for the purposes of the present study, because audience laughter serves as an important variable. Therefore, each disparagement joke was identified within clips when a character insulted, mocked, abused, or deprecated a target with humorous intentions. Humorous intentions were indicated by the presence of a smile, a lighthearted tone of voice, and/or an explicit statement such as “I’m only joking.” Coders documented vocalized disparagement for purposes of reliability, excluding behavioral-based elements such as a chair breaking beneath the weight of an obese character, a man burning dinner in the kitchen, and other stereotype-based behaviors. The ridicule may be masked with
non-tendentious elements such as wordplay, turns of phrase, and/or exaggeration. Also, the disparager’s speech and/or behavior may indicate the disparagement should not be taken seriously (which differentiates disparagement humor from sheer derogation). In other words, through a smile or a pat on the shoulder, the disparager may indicate to the target and audience that he/she is “just joking around.” The key element in disparagement humor is the insult of a target in a humorous manner. The insult may differ in its severity of tone. For example, when a comedian jokes about an overweight person who cannot fit into an airplane seat, a weakly toned joke might be, “You could stand to lose a few pounds.” A more severely toned joke might be, “I’m sorry sir, but gravy is not a beverage option on this flight” (Tosh, 2012). Disparagement humor often involves three parties: the target, disparager, and audience (Martin, 2007).

**Coding Schemes**

Coders rated each clip on 29 items, and each instance of disparagement humor on 16 items (Please see Appendix A for coding protocol). The items included general descriptive information such as the title of the clip and air date, as well as key variables related to the major concepts of the study: disparagement humor, *social validation*, and *social condemnation*.

*Disparagement humor*

After noting descriptive information about each video clip, including the clip’s title, network and air date, coders documented whether each segment of television programming contained disparagement humor. Coders transcribed each humorous insult, and then noted whether the joke was self- or other-disparaging. Next, coders determined the overall topic for the joke, choosing among weight, intelligence, race, gender, age,
sexual orientation, personality, socioeconomic background, culture, religion, and other. Coders then noted several characteristics of the joke’s target and perpetrator, including weight, race, age, sexual orientation, and gender.

Social Validation, Social Condemnation

When clips contained disparagement, coders noted the number of disparagement jokes contained in the clip and the frequency with which studio audiences, characters, and online viewers validated, condemned, and/or produced mixed responses to the humorous content contained in the clip. Coders documented studio audience reaction (live and manufactured) to the humor, choosing among (a) no response, (b) condemnation, (c) laughter, (d) applause, (e) laughter and applause, and (f) a mixture of condemnation and laughter/applause. Additionally, coders indicated how other characters responded to the disparagement. Finally, coders examined the commentary provided by actual online viewers, when present. They (a) documented the number of “supporting” comments, (b) counted the number of “condemning” comments, (c) counted the sheer number of comments, and then (d) determined, based on the count, whether the overall message communicated was one of social validation or social condemnation. Again, the clips represented the unit of analysis for the study. More than one disparagement joke often occurred within a given clip, and different jokes within the same clip elicit different reactions from the three audiences. We were interested in the overall frame. When the studio audience applauded a majority of jokes (75 percent) within the clip, and when the majority (75 percent) of viewer commentary endorsed the clip, the frame was one of social validation. For example, the most popular title on Comedy Central, Tosh.0, includes a skit called “20 Seconds on the Clock” in which the host, Daniel Tosh, insults
someone as many times as possible within the allotted time. The studio audience may laugh at 8 jokes, but express little response after 2. The overall frame would be one of social validation, because the majority of the audience clearly supports the humor. On the other hand, social condemnation involved negative responses to the message on the part of the studio audience, other characters, and/or a clear majority (75 percent) of online viewers. For example, the disparagement of one character by another might elicit “boos” from the studio audience. Characters may defend the person targeted by the humor, verbally lashing the original disparager. Online viewers may condemn the humor as inappropriate or not funny. Essentially, the coding protocol broke down and quantified specific elements of each frame, allowing coders to determine which frame is present.

**Coders & Reliability**

Coders were two doctoral students, one in mass communication and the other in forensic psychology. Both coders were white. One was female, the other male. The protocol contained more manifest than latent variables. Latent variables are often problematic for content analysis research, because they require subjective interpretation by coders, which may hinder reliability (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2005). Reliability was assessed by having both coders independently rate 85 online clips from 13 randomly selected comedic television programs. The clips represented 13 percent of the overall sample used in the final content analysis. Each major network was represented in the sample. The author used Krippendorf’s alpha to determine reliability. Thirty variables were included in the analysis. Coders attained perfect agreement (α=1.000) for 14 variables. Five items showed no variation, but were consistently classified in an accurate manner by both coders. Coders demonstrated high reliability (α=.90 or above) on four
items, and moderate reliability (α=.83 to .89) on four variables. One item, target sexual orientation, produced an unacceptable alpha (α=.66). An examination of the dataset showed that one coder labeled several characters heterosexual, while the other coder described the characters’ sexual orientation as “not indicated.” In the end, disparagement humor rarely involved character sexual orientation. Therefore, the variable was excluded from analysis. Coders produced acceptable reliability on the two remaining variables, target age (α=.79) and the overall frame used by disparaging online clips (α=.78). Since the frame variable is instrumental to the research, the author examined the data to determine the reason for the lower reliability. The problem lay in sample size rather than coder disagreement. Coders disagreed on 1 of 20 disparaging video clips they classified as being framed with social validation or social condemnation. Items and alphas are reflected in Table 2.

< TABLE 2 HERE >
Chapter 5: Study 1 Results

Disparagement humor was prevalent in the sample, addressing the first research question. Nearly one in four video clips (24 percent) contained disparagement humor, with characters humorously insulting one another in 157 out of 645 clips. Nearly every disparaging joke – 353 of 354 – targeted someone other than the joke-teller.

The second and third research questions examined demographic traits of characters who appeared in disparagement humor. The characters who appeared in disparagement humor most often were white, male, adult, and average weight, as reflected in Table 3.

< TABLE 3 HERE >

The author also was interested in whether demographic characteristics might inform whether characters were on the telling or receiving end of disparagement. To examine the question, Z-scores were used to compare the proportion of targets who were black/white, male/female, and overweight/average. No statistically significant difference emerged based on character race. However, female characters stood a significantly greater chance of being the target in disparagement humor than male characters ($z=2.14$, $p<.05$). Meanwhile, overweight characters stood a greater chance of being the victim of an insult, as reflected in Table 4. Overweight characters appeared in 114 disparagement jokes, including 70 times as target (or 61 percent). A Z-score test of proportions showed
that overweight characters did, in fact, stand a significantly greater chance than average-sized characters of being the target of disparagement humor ($z=2.91$, $p<.01$).

*TABLE 4 HERE*

A character’s weight, race, and gender do not necessarily dictate how the person will be insulted. Therefore, the fourth research question examined the subject of disparagement humor in online television clips to determine which topics most often provided the foundation for insult. Nearly one in three disparagement jokes (36 percent; 126 out of 346) targeted an individual’s physical appearance, including clothing, hairstyle, hair color, breast size, and physical attractiveness. Characters were ridiculed for wearing braces, looking ugly, being too short, having red hair, bearing facial scars, sporting tattoos. Most often, though, the jokes focused on a particular aspect of physical appearance: weight. Forty-six disparagement jokes targeted people for being overweight/obese. Personality ranked as the second most prevalent topic for disparagement, as 55 jokes insulted characters for being nerdy, shy, arrogant. Finally, 42 disparagement jokes targeted a character’s race or ethnicity. The topics of insult are reflected in Table 5.

*TABLE 5 HERE*

Nine of 31 programs included studio audience response, and seven of those nine included laugh tracks rather than live audiences. When present, studio audiences generally laughed, applauded and otherwise validated disparagement humor in the sample. Indeed, studio audiences validated 216 of 346 humorous insults. However, live studio audiences are less malleable to producer control. Therefore, disparaging remarks by the comedians on Tosh.0 and The Burn – two Comedy Central programs recorded in
front of live studio audiences – were greeted with a combination of laughter and disgust 13 times.

Characters within the comedic programs were less acceptable of disparagement humor, though hardly so. Five jokes received condemnation from characters besides the target and disparager, while four jokes elicited a combination of laughter and disgust. In two instances, characters came to the defense of a character subjected to ridicule. Nevertheless, the majority of disparaging remarks \((n=72)\) that elicited responses from other characters were validated.

Every television network except Fox offered online viewers the opportunity to post comments beneath video clips. Viewers often took advantage when presented the opportunity, posting comments beneath 72 of 132 clips containing disparagement humor on the CBS, NBC, ABC, and Comedy Central sites. Thirty-eight of the clips (or 52 percent) contained comments that primarily validated the humor. Online viewers condemned only six video clips containing disparagement humor. The remaining clips \((n=28)\) contained random comments in which viewers discussed topics unrelated to the humor, bemoaning the presence of advertisements or simply posting gibberish.

When examined in concert, the three levels of audience input generally framed disparagement humor using the social validation frame. Indeed, social validation served as the overall frame for 142 of 157 clips containing disparagement humor. Meanwhile, social condemnation framed 11 clips containing humorous insults, and audience members provided mixed overall feedback for three clips, as reflected in Table 7.

<TABLE 7 HERE>
Chapter 6: Study 1 Discussion

When audience members click “play” beneath online television clips, they often witness the disparagement of another person on the basis of gender, race, age, and other social characteristics, especially physical appearance and weight. Indeed, one in four television clips sampled here had disparagement humor. This means millions of audience members are viewing — and perhaps internalizing — the disparagement each day through television and the websites for ABC, Fox, NBC, CBS, and Comedy Central.

While content analyses do not reveal media effects, we can say disparagement humor reflects positively on characteristics of the American majority — average build, white, male, adult. Indeed, the demographic stood better chance of being the disparager than target in the humorous content sampled here. Conversely, women, people of color, and people who are overweight all stood greater chance of being ridiculed than being a disparager. Furthermore, characters who bucked the traditional ideal by bearing tattoos, braces, facial scars, or small breasts drew the ire of fellow characters.

More often than not, the humor was sanctioned three-fold: by studio audiences, other characters, and online commenters. As noted, content analyses cannot shed light on media effects. However, previous research suggests that viewers consider content funnier when it is accompanied by studio audience laughter, and audience members often consider disparagement more acceptable when it is accompanied by non-tendentious humor. Therefore, one might expect disparagement humor framed by social validation
would lead audience members to consider the content (a) funnier, and (b) more acceptable. They might then be more willing to share the content with other people, including friends and family, spreading the humor to additional audience members. The disparaging clip, then, may become an efficient vehicle for prejudice and discrimination. Without experimental evidence, the premise is merely conjecture. This is the reason for Study 2, which uses an experimental design to examine the moderating role of audience reaction (frames) on the reception and internalization of disparagement humor. The study builds off the results of Study 1, focusing on one of the most prevalent forms of disparagement humor and a pressing social issue: obesity.

The results of Study 1 reinforce previous research that shows American society stigmatizes overweight/obesity, despite its increasing commonality. The culture and its products — including television and advertising — endorse “thin is in, stout is out” messages (Klein & Schiffman, 2005), which may influence audience members’ perceptions concerning their own weight and the weight of others. In other samples of comedic content, overweight characters were subjected to negative remarks, both self-imposed and other-generated, more often than thin characters (Fouts & Burggraf, 2000; Fouts & Burggraf, 1999). Overweight characters were more likely to be shown eating, and less likely to be in serious romantic relationships than thin characters in another sample (Greenberg, Eastin, Hofschire, Lachlan & Brownell, 2003). The television world also underestimates the prevalence of the overweight population — most characters are of thin or average build, contrasting real-world statistics (Fouts & Vaughan, 2002; Fouts & Burggraf, 1999).
The significance of these negative messages is underscored by the sheer prevalence of weight problems in the United States. Overweight and obesity dramatically increased during the last 20 years, and more than one third (35.7 percent) of American adults are obese (Centers for Disease Control, 2012). None of the 50 states had a statewide prevalence less than 20 percent in 2011. The site of data collection for this project, Alabama, had an obesity prevalence of 32.2 percent in 2010, ranking among the heaviest states in the nation (CDC, 2012). Weight issues may carry significant consequences for the person affected, including both physical and mental health problems. They are at a greater risk of developing Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and certain types of cancer (Surgeon General, 2012). They may also be exposed to greater risk for depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues (IASO, 2012). The mental health issues may be related to the stigma attached to obesity. Several factors may nurture the stigma attached to overweight/obesity, including personal experience, body weight, family, friends, and the focus of the present research: media content. Study 1 shows that, indeed, weight issues remain a subject of disparagement in American comedic television content. Through an experimental design, Study 2 investigates the potential influence of disparagement humor on audience perceptions of themselves and others following exposure to disparagement and frames in which online audience reaction is socially validating or socially condemning.
Chapter 7: An Experiment Examining Conformity & Disparagement Humor Effects

Daniel Tosh, the comedian cited in Study 1, hosts a popular program on Comedy Central. The show, Tosh.0, averages 3.7 million viewers and attracts more than 6 million followers on the social network Twitter (Carlson, 2012). The show features Tosh, a 37-year-old thin white male, commenting on web-based videos such as user-posted clips found on YouTube. The host’s frequent insult of people based on race, gender, weight, and other characteristics has drawn criticism (Carlson, 2012). In July 2012, Tosh’s humor became the center of a national controversy when the comedian joked about rape during a stand-up routine. When a female audience member openly condemned the humor and stood up to leave, Tosh asked, “Wouldn’t it be funny if that girl got raped by, like five guys right now?” (Stanton, 2012). The audience laughed.

Soon after, a debate emerged concerning the effects of rape jokes and other forms of aggressive humor in which another person is demeaned. While rape jokes certainly differ from weight-based jokes and other forms of disparagement humor, the comedic forms share an undercurrent of hostility. Critics challenged the notion that disparagement humor is harmless, saying the jokes influence audience attitudes toward the person or group targeted by the disparaging remarks. At least one columnist condemned both the comedian and audience members who laughed. In an article Headlined, “Forget Tosh — The Outrage Isn’t the Joke, It’s the Laughter,” the author questioned why people would find such aggressive humor amusing (Chemaly, 2012).
The controversy underscores the practical importance of the research in Study 2, which examines whether disparagement humor and audience reaction influence viewer enjoyment, attitudes toward themselves and others, and why insulting humor amuses some people but not others. As noted in the literature review, scholars have long questioned why we experience mirth at the expense of others. Nevertheless, important questions remain empirically unexamined, and the experimental design outlined here should help close the gap in the existing literature. The experiment tests an important assumption advanced by superiority theories of tendentious humor, which contend that people enjoy witnessing the disparagement of disliked others because they experience a boost in self-esteem. Importantly, it also examines self-esteem change from the perspective of people who identify with the target of the humor, predicting decreased self-worth among audience members who witness the ridicule of an in-group member.

The experiment also adds to the existing literature by testing whether exposure to disparagement humor — specifically in a mediated setting — influences attitudes toward the person or group targeted by the demeaning joke. While critics contend disparagement humor nurtures negative attitudes toward the targeted person and/or group, the idea has yet to receive empirical support. Finally, the study examines the potential influence of audience reactions (or social frames) on a person’s own response to disparagement humor, and helps us to better understand an increasingly popular mechanism of social influence — online commentary. Specifically, the experiment investigates the potential influence of four conditions: a control condition, in which viewers watch an online video clip of an obese teen sliding down a slip-in-slide; a condition containing disparagement without audience reaction, in which Daniel Tosh disparages the obese teen as the video
plays in the background; a condition with socially validating audience reaction, in which Tosh’s comments are accompanied by viewer posts applauding the humor; and a condition with socially condemning audience reaction, in which the comedian’s comments are accompanied by viewer posts condemning the humor as inappropriate.

When confronted with ambiguous or uncertain situations, individuals often look to the example of others to determine whether their attitudes and behavioral intentions are appropriate. A violation of social norms may translate into social condemnation or exclusion, a negative consequence potentially avoided through conformity – changing one’s explicit opinion to match the dominant attitude of proximate others. Disparagement humor may present such an ambiguous situation, toeing the line between inappropriate and laughable. Therefore, the attitudes and behaviors of other audience members, whether laughter or condemnation, may influence the degree to which an individual audience member openly expresses appreciation of the humor. As noted in the literature review, canned laughter and studio applause significantly influence home viewers’ appreciation of television content. The current study carries the assumption into an online mediated environment, seeking to determine whether viewer commentary posted beneath online video clips may also serve as a social cue, framing the content much the same as studio audience responses. As reported in Study 1, comedic television clips are often accompanied by viewer commentary, and more often than not the commentary validates the disparagement. However, the potential effect of the socially validating audience reaction and socially condemning audience reaction frames on audience attitudes remain unexamined. Therefore, Study 2 first advances the following hypothesis:
H₁: Viewers’ reported enjoyment of disparagement humor will significantly differ depending on how the humorous content is framed, such that viewers who encounter a *socially validating audience reaction frame* will report the greatest enjoyment.

While viewers certainly encounter social cues while watching television clips online, they also bring individual differences into the viewing environment that may strengthen or weaken their appreciation for the humor. As Zillmann and Cantor (1976) documented, the enjoyment of disparagement humor is significantly influenced by the audience member’s existing *attitudes or dispositions* toward the targeted group and disparager. Indeed, Zillmann and Cantor’s disposition theory predicts audience members will experience mirth when they endorse negative dispositions toward the target. The present experiment advances the research into a mediated environment, while building off the results presented in Study 1 in which characters’ weight frequently informs the punchline of online disparagement humor. In this case, we should expect the greatest amount of mirth from audience members who hold strong negative attitudes toward people who are overweight. Therefore, the study advances the following hypothesis:

H₂. Existing anti-fat bias will significantly and positively predict viewers’ enjoyment of disparagement humor regardless of condition.

While the relationship among existing biases, social influence, and appreciation of disparagement humor have been investigated in isolation, they have yet to be examined in concert. One might expect, based on disparagement theories and social influence research, that the social norm communicated through *socially validating audience reaction* and *socially condemning audience reaction* frames will influence the degree to which biased audience members are willing to endorse disparagement humor, because
endorsing attitudes and behavior contrary to prevailing social norms may result in condemnation or social exclusion. Therefore, the experiment next advances the following hypotheses:

H₃. The frame will moderate the contribution of existing anti-fat bias to viewers’ reported enjoyment of the comedic content.

Specifically, the hypothesis predicts:

H₃ᵃ. Exposure to the *socially validating audience reaction* frame will significantly strengthen the positive relationship between existing anti-fat bias and enjoyment.

H₃ᵇ. Exposure to the *socially condemning audience reaction* frame will significantly weaken the positive relationship between existing anti-fat bias and enjoyment.

H₃ᶜ. Exposure to the *disparagement commentary with no audience reaction* frame will have no significant effect on the positive relationship between existing anti-fat bias and enjoyment.

H₃ᵈ. Exposure to the control condition will have no significant effect on the positive relationship between existing anti-fat bias and enjoyment.

As noted in the introduction, Daniel Tosh was not alone when he recently found himself in the center of controversy. Critics questioned why audience members would find the derogation of another human being humorous. Disparagement theorists assume people enjoy disparagement humor because they experience a temporary boost in self-esteem, which is conceptualized here as one’s attitude concerning his/her individual self-worth. Study 1 showed that disparagement humor often reinforces traditional power dynamics in society, targeting minority others: women, racial minorities, and people who
are overweight. When an individual witnesses a “different other” insulted, and a “similar other” tells the joke, he/she should experience a boost in self-esteem because the humor is essentially reinforcing the value of the listener and disparager’s characteristics. Nevertheless, this important assumption underlying disparagement theories has not been empirically examined. Therefore, the study tests the following hypothesis:

H₄. As predicted by disparagement theories, self-esteem change will mediate the positive relationship between existing anti-fat bias and enjoyment of the comedic content.

While Zillmann and Cantor (1976) predicted mirth would be dependent upon audience members’ dispositions toward disparager and target, early disparagement theorists (Middleton, 1959) reported associations between identification and enjoyment of another person’s comedic ridicule. For example, a person who self-identifies as overweight should not enjoy the disparagement of an overweight person because the joke represents an affront to an in-group member with whom the audience member identifies. Therefore, it’s important we understand the potential implications for someone who identifies with the target and disparager. The present experiment advances the following hypothesis concerning viewers’ identification with the target in online disparagement humor:

H₅. As predicted by early disparagement theories, viewers’ identification with the target of disparagement humor will significantly and negatively predict enjoyment of the disparagement content.

Nevertheless, social influence may again strengthen or weaken an individual’s willingness to report enjoyment of another’s ridicule, whether the designation of the viewers’ me and other is primarily informed by group belonging (identification) or
disposition (explicit attitudes). When one witnesses the ridicule of an out-group member accompanied by social validation, the individual viewer may perceive greater social support for condemnation and therefore be more willing to openly express enjoyment of the ridicule. Similarly, social validation may weaken the negative association between target identification and enjoyment.

H₆. The social frame for the disparagement humor will moderate the contribution of identification with the target to viewers’ reported enjoyment of the comedic content. Specifically, the hypothesis predicts:

H₆ₐ. Exposure to the socially validating audience reaction frame will weaken the negative relationship between target identification and reported enjoyment.

H₆₇. Exposure to the socially condemning audience reaction frame will strengthen the negative relationship between target identification and reported enjoyment.

H₆₈. Exposure to disparagement commentary with no audience reaction will have no significant effect on the negative relationship between target identification and reported enjoyment.

H₆₉. Exposure to the control condition will have no significant effect on the negative relationship between target identification and reported enjoyment.

Identification is not necessarily unilateral. While an individual audience member may not identify with the disparaged target, he/she may strongly identify with the disparager. Therefore, social cues may strengthen or weaken the influence of one’s identification with the humorist on reported enjoyment.

H₇: Viewers’ identification with the disparager will significantly and positively predict enjoyment of the comedic content.
H₈. The frame for disparagement humor will moderate the contribution of identification with the *disparager* to viewers’ reported enjoyment of the comedic content. Specifically,  
H₈ₐ. Exposure to the *socially validating audience reaction* frame will strengthen the positive relationship between *disparager* identification and reported enjoyment.

H₈ₐ. Exposure to the *socially condemning audience reaction* frame will weaken the positive relationship between *disparager* identification and reported enjoyment.

H₈c. Exposure to the *disparagement commentary with no audience reaction* will have no significant effect on the relationship between *disparager* identification and reported enjoyment.

H₈d. Exposure to the control condition will have no significant effect on the relationship between *disparager* identification and reported enjoyment.

While normative information may communicate an open environment for prejudice, the individual audience member may not necessarily hold negative attitudes toward the target of the joke. In fact, the person may more readily identify with the target, and therefore internalize the negative comments as applicable to himself/herself. The premise has not been tested in relation to disparagement humor. This study seeks to fill the gap, while also examining whether self-esteem threat is heightened based on the prevalent norm that is communicated through the *social validation* and *social condemnation* frames. In other words, an individual who identifies with the target may think, “Everyone else finds the joke funny,” and make the leap in thought that society
dislikes people who resemble the target. Martin (2007) noted the role humor plays in
social relationships and identity:

Since being the target of others’ laughter is painful and something most people seek to
avoid, aggressive forms of humor can also be used as a method of coercing people into
conforming to desired behaviors. Within social groups, humor is often used to enforce
group norms, either by making fun of the discrepant actions and traits of people who are
outside the group or by teasing members within the group when they engage in deviant
behavior. Thus, in aggressive types of joking, teasing, ridicule, or sarcasm, humor can be
used to exclude individuals from a group, reinforce power and status differences,
suppress behavior that does not conform to group norms, and have a coercive influence
on others. (p. 17)

Therefore, the study advances the following hypotheses:

H₉. A significant negative relationship will emerge between viewers’
identification with overweight targets and self-esteem.

H₁₀. The social frame will moderate the negative relationship between viewers’
identification with overweight targets and self-esteem change, such that:

H₁₀a. Exposure to the socially validating audience reaction frame will strengthen
the negative relationship between target identification and self-esteem change.

H₁₀b. Exposure to the socially condemning audience reaction frame will weaken
the negative relationship between target identification and self-esteem change.

H₁₀c. Exposure to the disparagement commentary without audience reaction will
have no significant effect on the negative relationship between target
identification and self-esteem change.

H₁₀d. Exposure to the control condition will have no significant effect on the
negative relationship between target identification and self-esteem change.

Should disparagement humor influence audience members’ perceptions
concerning themselves and others, an online disparagement video presents a potentially
powerful agent of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. For example, a biased audience member who enjoys witnessing the ridicule of another person may disseminate the content worldwide with the click of a button. This study proposes that an important variable – perceived social norms – separates viewers’ attitudes toward disparagement humor and whether they would be willing to share the content through social media. Indeed, social psychological research supports the proposition that normative information may dampen, enhance, or even determine whether an individual is willing to act on his/her attitudes. The normative information contained in the *socially validating audience reaction* and *socially condemning audience reaction* frames should shape participants’ perceptions of social norms, which are often informed by proximate information. This information should then inform participants’ decisions whether to act on the enjoyment they experienced while viewing the humorous clip and share the material with others. Therefore, the study advances the following hypotheses:

$H_{11}$. Social frame will significantly predict viewers’ perceived social norms, such that viewers who encounter the *socially validating audience reaction* frame will report greater perceived social endorsement of the humor.

$H_{12}$. Perceived social norms will moderate the positive relationship between viewers’ enjoyment and behavioral intentions.

By definition, disparagement humor contains negative messages about a characteristic of social belonging. While the message may be cloaked by non-tendentious elements, disparagement humor endorses negative commentary concerning social demographics such as race, gender, age, religion, and physical appearance. Previous research has found no significant relationship between exposure to disparagement humor
and explicit attitudes concerning the targeted group following exposure to the humor. Nevertheless, critics of demeaning jokes contend that disparagement humor actually nurtures negative attitudes toward people who are the subject of ridicule. Therefore, the final hypothesis seeks to provide additional empirical evidence concerning the influence – or lack thereof – of disparagement humor on attitudes toward the targeted group, while also examining the influence of social validation and condemnation on whether attitudes are expressed or internalized.

$H_{13}$. The social frame will significantly predict post-test anti-fat bias, such that participants who encounter the *socially validating audience reaction* frame will report greater explicit anti-fat bias.

In all, the experimental design will address the potential influence of conformity on the appreciation and effects of exposure to disparagement humor. The study will examine the influence of exposure to disparagement humor on (a) explicit individual self-esteem, (b) explicit attitudes toward the targeted group, (c) enjoyment of the humor, (d) perceptions of social norms, and (e) behavioral intentions. Importantly, the study will also examine the intervening influence of social normative information and identification.
Chapter 8: Study 2 Methodology

Participants

Participants were recruited through the research participant pool at a university in the South. Participants were 18 years or older. Otherwise, participants were not excluded from the research on the basis of demographic characteristics such as race, gender, income, etc. While 393 participants completed the pre-test questionnaire, 221 returned for the post-test, representing a retention rate of 56 percent and satisfying power requirements as determined using G* Power statistical software (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang & Buchner, 2009). The research was conducted in compliance with Institutional Review Board guidelines during fall 2012 and spring 2013. Participants received course credit in exchange for participation. Otherwise, they received no compensation.

Procedure

Participants registered for the study through the research pool for a college of communication. The overall design included two tests (before stimulus exposure and after). Participants self-registered for the pre-test questionnaire, which they accessed online through the participant pool. While 421 participants began the questionnaire, 393 completed it. Participants were predominantly white (n=336, 86 percent), female (n=308, 78 percent), and between ages 18 and 21 (n=354, 90 percent). Fifty-six percent (n=220) grew up in households with an approximate annual income of $80,000 or more. When asked to indicate their political identity, 50 percent (n=195) indicated slightly to strongly
conservative, 32 percent \((n=126)\) moderate, and 18 percent \((n=72)\) slightly to strongly liberal. The pre-test questionnaire included measures of (a) self-esteem, (b) explicit attitudes toward obese people, (c) demographic information, (d) the extent to which participants identify with overweight people, and (e) media use. The measures from the pre-test questionnaire are outlined in additional detail below, and in the appendices. In terms of media use, 256 pre-test participants (65 percent) said they watch comedic television programming “most of the time” or “always.” Indeed, comedy was most popular out of 12 genres of television programming. When asked how frequently they watch television, nearly one in three participants \((n=122, 31\%)\) indicated every day of the week. Online viewing was popular, as 70 percent of participants \((n=275)\) said they watch television clips at least once a week using a laptop or tablet computer. Furthermore, video sharing via social media was prevalent. One in five participants \((n=78, 20\%)\) said they share video clips through social media at least once a week, while 66 (17 percent) indicated “once a month,” and 68 (17 percent) indicated “two or three times a month.” Meanwhile, watching video clips posted by acquaintances also appeared popular. Forty-two percent of participants \((n=167)\) indicated that they watch video clips shared by others at least once a week. Finally, one in four participants \((n=101, 25\%)\) indicated that they read comments beneath online videos “often” or “very often” and 137 participants (35 percent) said they “sometimes” read the comments.

At the end of the questionnaire, participants provided their student identification number so responses from the pre- and post-test questionnaires could be matched during data analysis. Once participants completed the pre-test, they had the option of registering for the post-test in exchange for additional course credit. A week after registering,
participants appeared for an in-person research session in a computer lab in the communications building. Each participant was randomly assigned to a computer. Once participants sat at a computer, they were asked to watch a short online video (the stimulus material) and then complete an accompanying online questionnaire. Participants donned headphones, and then encountered the stimulus material followed by the post-test questionnaire. The questionnaire included items for (a) enjoyment, (b) perceptions of social norms, (c) explicit attitudes toward obese people, (d) explicit state self-esteem, (e) behavioral intentions, and (d) a thought-listing measure. The concepts are operationalized below, and individual items appear in the appendices. In all, 221 participants returned for the post-test, representing a retention rate of 56 percent. When participants completed the questionnaire, they were debriefed, thanked for their time, and dismissed. Females \( n=168, 76 \) percent outnumbered males \( n=53, 24 \) percent in the overall sample. White \( n=192, 87 \) percent participants outnumbered African American \( n=18, 8 \) percent, Hispanic \( n=3, 1 \) percent, Asian \( n=6, 3 \) percent, and Native American \( n=1, .5 \) percent participants. Participants were predominantly between ages 18 and 21 \( n=191, 90 \) percent, came from households with an annual income over $80,000 \( n=121, 57 \) percent, were moderately to very religious \( n=137, 65 \) percent, and described themselves as politically conservative \( n=99, 47 \) percent. Finally, 23 percent of participants \( n=51 \) marked *somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree* when asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement, “I see myself as overweight.” Seventy-two percent of participants marked *somewhat disagree \( n=20 \), disagree \( n=72 \), or strongly disagree \( n=60 \).*

*Stimulus Material*
The stimulus material included video clips from Tosh.0. As noted earlier, the show frequently involves stereotype-based disparagement humor about people based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and other characteristics. The experiment focused on weight-based disparagement humor, building off the findings of the content analysis in Study 1. The stimulus material included video in which the thin white male host, Daniel Tosh, insulted another person based on weight. Treatment conditions are outlined below. The video was embedded in a fake website page to represent an online viewing environment, incorporating “viewer comments” in a section below the video in which audience members posted thoughts concerning the clip. (Please see the final appendix for a visual example).

The experiment included four conditions: (1) control, (2) disparagement commentary with no audience reaction, (3) disparagement with socially validating audience reaction, and (4) disparagement with socially condemning audience reaction. As noted earlier, control condition participants watched a web video in which an obese teen lost control while sliding down a “slip-and-slide,” crashing face first into a pool of water and then grass. The same video was used in the three remaining conditions, except they each included disparaging commentary from Tosh. Tosh commented, “Huh, you mean that reservoir at the end of the slip-and-slide wasn’t enough to contain him?” followed by, “At least he got something to eat at the end,” “Stay calm, just keep him wet – we need buckets,” “Looks like Michael Phelps is still smoking pot,” and “It’s like watching a jumbo jet land on an aircraft carrier.” The disparagement without audience reaction condition included Tosh insulting the obese teen who went down the slip-and-slide. It included no audience reaction beneath the video. In the disparagement with
socially validating audience reaction condition, the video was accompanied by six validating comments from viewers. Comments included, “This is hilarious,” accompanied by 8 “likes,” “I love that they put this on tv it’s so right” accompanied by 16 “likes,” “Tosh makes me laugh,” “epic video dude,” “You really should post more of this stuff. It’s hilarious,” and “lol. tosh is so right.” Additionally, a green bar beneath the video showed that 1,540 viewers had “liked” the video while 9 “disliked.” In contrast, the disparagement with socially condemning audience reaction condition included the six comments “I can’t believe they put this on tv,” accompanied by 16 likes, “this is horrible,” accompanied by 8 likes, “Tosh makes me sick,” “lame video dude,” “You really shouldn’t post this stuff. It’s hurtful,” and “not funny. tosh is so wrong.” In the socially condemning audience reaction frame, the video contained a red bar that showed 1,540 viewers “disliked” the video while 9 “liked.”

Independent Variables: Social Frame, Target Identification, Disparager Identification, Existing Anti-fat Bias

The design included four independent variables: social frame (control, disparagement without audience reaction, socially validating audience reaction, and socially condemning audience reaction) explicit attitudes toward people who are obese, and the extent to which an individual self-identified with people who are overweight and the host of the clip. Treatment condition was determined randomly. When the participant showed up for the in-person research session, he/she was randomly assigned by the experimenter to a computer terminal. One of the four treatment conditions was present on the computer. The second independent variable was assessed using the Attitudes Toward Obese Persons (ATOP) scale developed by Allison, Basile and Yuker (1991). The scale
included 20 items that participants rated using a 7-point Likert scale. The measure included items such as “Obese people are not as happy as nonobese people,” and “Most nonobese people would not want to marry anyone who is obese,” which participants rated from 1 (I strongly disagree) to 7 (I strongly agree). The 20 items demonstrated reliability in previous studies, including $\alpha=.84$ when the scale was originally developed (Allison, Basile, Yuker, 1991; Please see Appendix C). It demonstrated strong reliability in both the pre-test ($\alpha=.83, M=82.36, SD=13.01$) and post-test ($\alpha=.88, M=81.58, SD=14.02$).

The third independent variable, target identification, was measured using three statements that participants rated from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much so). Statements included “I identify with people who are overweight,” “I see myself as overweight,” and “I feel strong ties with people who are overweight.” The items, which appear in Appendix D, are a modification of a scale that has shown reliability in previous research ($\alpha=.83$ in Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995; $\alpha=.81$ in Spears, Doosje & Ellemers, 1997). In the present study, the weight identification scale demonstrated acceptable reliability in the pre-test ($\alpha=.79, M=8.82, SD=4.21$) and post-test ($\alpha=.72, M=8.69, SD=3.73$).

The fourth independent variable, disparager identification, was measured by asking participants to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement “I identify with the host of the clip” using a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) scale ($M=3.88, SD=1.63$).

Dependent Variables: Self-esteem Change, Post Explicit AFB, Enjoyment, Behavioral Intentions, Perceptions of Social Norms

The experiment included five dependent variables: explicit state self-esteem, explicit attitudes toward people who are obese, enjoyment of the video, perceptions of social norms, and behavioral intentions. The post-test assessed explicit attitudes using the same
Individual state self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Participants rated 10 statements using a 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) scale. Statements included items such as “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself,” “I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others,” and “I wish I could have more respect for myself (reverse coded).” Five statements were positively worded, while five statements were negatively worded (and reverse coded). The self-esteem measure was administered during the pre- and post-tests, so changes in state self-esteem could be documented following exposure to disparagement humor (Please see Appendix E). The scale demonstrated strong reliability in the pre-test ($\alpha = .88$, $M=31.29$, $SD=4.66$) and the post-test ($\alpha = .89$, $M=31.75$, $SD=4.51$). Change was assessed by subtracting pre-test responses from post-test responses. A single-item measure gauged participants’ perceptions of social norms, asking them to rate the statement “Other people would find this funny” using a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) scale ($M=5.63$, $SD=.96$). Enjoyment was assessed using a four-item measure ($\alpha = .93$, $M=20.00$, $SD=7.15$) in which participants indicated, using a 1 to 5 scale, the extent to which the video clip was (a) entertaining, (b) involving, (c) enjoyable, and (d) funny. Finally, behavioral intention was measured by asking participants to rate, using a 7-point Likert scale, the likelihood they would forward the disparagement humor video to (a) friends, (b) parents, (c) co-workers, and (d) a professor, and (e) share the video through social media. The scale, which included five items, demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = .91$, $M=11.79$, $SD=6.40$). Descriptive statistics for the measures appear in Table 8, while intercorrelations for the continuous variables appear in Table 9.

< TABLES 8 & 9 HERE >
Chapter 9: Study 2 Results

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 19. Rather than testing each hypothesis individually, seven analyses were conducted to reduce the likelihood of Type 1 Error (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Analysis 1 for $H_1$, $H_{11}$, $H_{13}$: Test of Dependent Variables

The first analysis examined Hypotheses 1, 11 and 13, which shared the independent variable of social frame. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted using three continuous dependent variables: enjoyment of the comedic video clip, perceived social norms concerning the humorous content, and anti-fat bias following exposure to the content. Tests of multivariate normality, multicollinearity, and homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices revealed no significant issues. In addition, the sample size requirement for MANOVA procedures (at least 20 participants per cell) was met, with the sample distributed relatively even across conditions (Field, 2009; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). A non-significant Box’s $M$ test ($p=.119$) indicated homogeneity of covariance matrices of the dependent variables across levels of social frame. However, Levene’s test indicated a violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variance for perceived social norms. Therefore, Pillai’s trace was chosen as the test statistic because it is “the most robust to violations of assumptions” (Field, 2009, p. 605). The analysis yielded a significant multivariate main effect for social frame, Pillai’s trace $= .117$, $F(9, 651) = 2.93$, $p<.01$, $\eta^2_p = .04$. Means and standard deviations are reflected in
Table 10. As predicted by H1, the univariate test yielded a significant main effect of social frame for enjoyment, $F(3, 217) = 7.36, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$. Planned comparisons indicated that participants in the control condition experienced significantly less enjoyment than those exposed to the three experimental conditions of the socially validating audience reaction, the socially condemning audience reaction, and the disparagement commentary with no audience reaction. While significant differences did not emerge among the socially validating, socially condemning, and disparagement with no audience reaction conditions, the means appeared in the predicted direction as seen in Table 10. Thus, H1 was partially supported, showing that the presence of the frame significantly influenced reported enjoyment.

Univariate planned comparisons failed to yield significant main effects of social frame on perceived social norms concerning the humorous content or on anti-fat bias following exposure to the content. Therefore, no support was found for Hypothesis 11, which predicted that viewers’ perceptions of social norms would be significantly higher for participants who encountered validation. Furthermore, no support was found for Hypothesis 13, which predicted that viewers’ anti-fat bias following exposure to disparagement humor would significantly differ in relation to social frame.

< TABLE 10 HERE >

Analyses 2, 3, 4 for $H_2, H_3, H_5-H_8$: Examining Individual Difference Variables

Previous research suggests three individual characteristics – existing dispositions such as anti-fat bias, target identification, and disparager identification – should significantly predict the extent to which audience members reportedly enjoy disparagement humor. The present study re-examines these assumptions through an
additional lens: social frames. Therefore, the next series of analyses tested the social frame of online disparagement humor on reported enjoyment across social frame groups, while also accounting for and examining the potential effect of one or more individual difference characteristics – i.e., anti-fat bias, target identification, and disparager identification – on this relationship. In order to examine the corresponding hypotheses (H2, H3, and H5 through H8), analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) were conducted in which enjoyment was entered as the dependent variable and social frame as the fixed factor. Three analyses were performed. In each analysis, each individual characteristic variable was entered into the analysis as a potential covariate and then treated as an independent factor. Product terms were created (i.e., social frame X existing anti-fat bias) to determine whether the predictors significantly interacted on enjoyment. The assumptions were tenable concerning normality, independence of the covariate and treatment effect, and homogeneity of regression slopes.

The first analysis investigated whether (H2) existing anti-fat bias significantly predicted enjoyment, and whether (H3) the association strengthened based on social cues framing the video clip. The ANCOVA yielded a significant main effect of existing anti-fat bias $F(1, 204) = 4.52, p < .05$, indicating its significant prediction of reported enjoyment of the video and substantiating H2. Results also yielded a significant main effect for social frame, $F(3, 204) = 8.00, p < .001$, illustrating that enjoyment significantly differed across social frame conditions. However, no support emerged for H3, as the ANCOVA planned comparisons yielded no significant interaction between social frame and existing anti-fat bias on enjoyment.
Echoing early disparagement theories, H5 predicted viewers’ identification with the *target* of disparagement humor would significantly and negatively predict enjoyment of the online television clip. A second ANCOVA was conducted, in which enjoyment was entered as the dependent variable, social frame the fixed factor, and target identification as a covariate treated as an independent factor. Contrary to expectations, viewer identification with the disparaged target did not significantly predict enjoyment. Furthermore, no significant interaction emerged between target identification and social frame. Thus, Hypotheses 5 and 6 lacked support.

In the third and final analysis of enjoyment, a third ANCOVA was conducted to determine whether viewers’ identification with the *disparager* would significantly and positively predict enjoyment of the comedic content (H7), and whether the social frame viewers encountered while watching the television clip strengthened the association (H8). Enjoyment was entered as the dependent variable, social frame as the fixed factor, and disparager identification as a covariate treated as an independent factor. The ANCOVA analysis yielded a significant main effect for social frame, \( F(3, 213) = 2.86, p < .05 \), illustrating that enjoyment significantly differed across social frame conditions. Results also yielded a significant main effect of disparager identification, \( F(1, 213) = 88.33, p < .001 \), indicating that the extent to which an audience member identified with the disparager significantly predicted enjoyment of the video content, substantiating H7. The Estimates of Fixed Effects, \( b = 2.15, t(213) = 3.93, p < .001 \), indicated that the relationship between disparager identification and enjoyment was positive, as expected. Nonetheless, no significant interaction emerged between disparager identification and social frame, \( F(3, 213) = .126, p = .945 \). Thus, H8 was not supported.
Analysis 5 for H4: Mediation Analysis

Disparagement theorists assume that people enjoy witnessing the ridicule of a disliked other because they experience a temporary increase in self-esteem. As such, H4 predicted self-esteem change would mediate the relationship between existing anti-fat bias and enjoyment. In order to examine the assumption, a simple mediation analysis was conducted using the SOBEL macro for SPSS (Preacher & Hayes, 2004), which estimates the total, direct, and indirect effects of a causal variable (X) on an outcome variable (Y) through a proposed mediator (M). The macro simultaneously conducted two mediation analyses, including a traditional Sobel test for mediation effects, and bootstrapping procedures (1,000 samples) for estimating indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Anti-fat bias was entered as the causal variable, enjoyment the outcome variable, and self-esteem change the mediator. The analysis yielded no indirect effect. Thus, H4 was not supported.

Analysis 6 for H9, H10: Test of Self-Esteem Change

While disparagement theorists assume biased audience members experience self-esteem boost through witnessing the disparagement of someone who belongs to another group they dislike, they do not account for how self-esteem may be affected for people who identify with targets of the humor. Therefore, the present study sought to fill the gap by examining H9, which stated that viewers’ identification with disparaged targets would significantly and negatively predict self-esteem change. Also, the study examined the potential moderating role of social frame on the negative association between target identification and self-esteem change (H10). In order to examine these hypotheses, a regression analysis was conducted in which self-esteem change was entered as the
dependent variable. Since categorical variables cannot be used in regression analyses, the author transformed the four-level variable of social frame into three new variables – validation, condemnation, and disparagement – using simple effects coding. Seven variables were entered into Block 1 of the regression as independent variables: target identification, validation, condemnation, disparagement, and three product terms of validationXtargetidentification, condemnationXtargetidentification, and disparagementXtargetidentification. Assumptions were tenable regarding multicollinearity, independent errors, normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity.

The overall model was significant, meaning that social frame and target identification explained a significant proportion of variance in self-esteem change scores, $R^2 = .09$, $F(7, 204) = 2.72, p = .01$. Substantiating H9, target identification negatively predicted self-esteem change, $\beta = -.171, t(204) = -2.48, p < .05$. Nevertheless, the interaction terms did not significantly predict self-esteem changes, which means a significant interaction did not emerge between social frame and target identification when it came to self-esteem. Therefore, H10 was not supported.

Analysis 7: $H_{12}$

The final analysis examined Hypothesis 12, which predicted viewers’ perceived social norms would moderate the significant positive relationship between viewers’ enjoyment of the video clip and behavioral intentions. The likelihood viewers would be willing to share the disparagement humor with acquaintances, including family, friends, co-workers, and professors, should increase when they enjoy the video. However, viewers’ perceptions concerning whether others would find the video funny should strengthen the association, since research shows both attitudes and social normative cues
inform our behavioral intentions. In order to examine the hypothesis, a linear regression analysis was conducted. First, the two predictor variables were mean centered. Second, an interaction term was created. Behavioral intention was entered into the regression analysis as the dependent variable. Three variables were entered into Block 1 as independent variables: enjoyment, perceived social norms, and the interaction term of enjoyment X perceived social norms. Assumptions were tenable regarding multicollinearity, independent errors, normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity.

The overall model was significant, $R^2=.45$, $F(3, 217) = 58.63$, $p<.001$, meaning enjoyment and perceived social norms significantly predicted nearly 45 percent of the variance in self-esteem change. As expected, enjoyment significantly and positively predicted behavioral intentions, $\beta=.67, t(217) = 12.68, p<.001$. However, perceived social norm did not independently and significantly predict behavioral intentions, $\beta=-.03, t(217) = -4.95, p=.62$. Nonetheless, a significant interaction emerged between enjoyment and perceived social norms, such that the variables significantly and positively predicted behavioral intentions, $\beta=.19, t(217) = 3.63, p<.001$. Simple slopes for the association between enjoyment and behavioral intentions were tested for low (-1 SD below the mean), moderate (mean), and high (+1 SD above the mean) levels of perceived social norms. The latter two simple slopes revealed a significant positive association between enjoyment and behavioral intention, with the strongest correlation at moderate levels of perceived social norms ($B=.13.48$, $p<.001$), followed by high ($B=1.98$, $p<.05$), as reflected in Figure 1.

< FIGURE 1 HERE >
Chapter 10: Study 2 Discussion

The results outlined here reinforce a number of assumptions underlying disparagement theories and theories of social influence. Audience members bring existing biases into the viewing environment, which positively predict the extent to which they will experience mirth after witnessing the comedic ridicule of someone they dislike. Furthermore, audience members experience greater enjoyment the more they identify with the person telling the disparaging joke. Nevertheless, people rarely encounter mediated content in an isolated environment. Rather, social cues are present in the form of studio audience applause and laughter, and more recently through viewer commentary beneath online videos. When the remarks are positive, labeling humor as entertaining, the frame socially validates the humor and nurtures the greatest reported enjoyment among audience members. The results are important, because they demonstrate a number of potential contributors to an individual audience member’s enjoyment of disparagement humor. Nevertheless, an unexpected result emerged in which the social frame did not interact with existing anti-fat bias, target identification, and disparager identification. It appears, based on the results presented in Study 2, that socially validating audience audience reaction and socially condemning audience reaction do not necessarily carry the strength to significantly dampen or strengthen the existing biases and identification viewers bring into the media environment.
Perhaps the most important finding of Study 2 dealt with self-esteem. Contrary to the assumptions of disparagement theorists, self-esteem boost did not mediate the relationship between (a) existing biases and (b) enjoyment of disparagement humor. The assumption certainly bears further investigation, as the results presented here are limited in generalizability. Nevertheless, previous examinations of disparagement humor did not address the potential for self-esteem threat among audience members who identify with the person targeted in the humor. While disparagement humor does not necessarily nurture negative attitudes toward others (through increased anti-fat bias, in this case), tendentious humor may indeed carry negative consequences. In the present study, the extent to which audience members identified with the person targeted by disparagement humor significantly – and negatively – predicted self-esteem change. In other words, the results suggest people experience self-esteem decreases when witnessing the comedic ridicule of a similar other. The implications are especially significant when viewed in light of Study 1’s findings, as examined in more detail during the overall discussion below.

Finally, while viewers may enjoy disparagement humor through online video clips, the results suggest that the likelihood they will share the content increases the more they believe other people would also find the content funny. The finding may seem obvious, but it underscores the significance of perceived social norms in the relationship between personal enjoyment and open endorsement of disparagement humor. When the conditions are right, and people enjoy disparaging humor and perceive social support, the door apparently opens for the quick dissemination of prejudiced material through email, social media, and other online outlets.
Directions for future research

The study provides the foundation for a future line of research in which the author will examine social influence, stereotyping, and prejudice in new media environments. The research will marry findings in media effects, new media, and normative influence. For example, future research should account for the proximity of the source of influence. An individual may experience greater pressure to conform when a close person communicates the norm. In the present study, six people communicated normative information through comments posted below a disparaging video. Space separates the commenters and participant, because the exchange occurred in a mediated environment rather than the real world and the commenters expected no direct response from the participant. In previous research (e.g. Blanchard, Crandall, Brigham & Vaughan, 1994), targets and confederates stood side-by-side in the real world. Social impact theory (see Latané, 1981) predicts such proximity would elicit greater conformity. Additionally, people may report attitudes that are congruent with prevailing norms when they expect the opinions will be made public rather than private. For example, Blanchard and colleagues (1994) found that participants reported greater anti-racism sentiments when they expressed the views aloud rather than writing them down on paper and sealing them in an envelope. Commentary is increasingly popular in today’s computer-based environments, allowing people to share opinions about people, issues, events, and other attitude objects through either identifiable (see Facebook) or anonymous (see YouTube) postings. When people are granted anonymity, they may be more likely to express socially unacceptable opinions, compared to instances in which they are required to provide their name.
Finally, future research should account for characteristics of the source conveying the normative information. The literature on persuasion underscores the importance of source characteristics, such that people are often more readily persuaded when they identify with the source of the appeal. Furthermore, a person may be more susceptible to conformity when he/she identifies with the source (Crandall & Stangor, 2005). For example, Stangor and colleagues (2001; Study 2) found that participants endorsed more positive stereotypes about African-Americans when favorable consensus information came from in-group members rather than out-group members. In the dissertation, the sources of influence (the commenters) were kept the same across conditions for purposes of control. No commenter photos appeared – only written statements.
Chapter 11: General Discussion

This dissertation sought to examine (a) the prevalence and content of disparagement humor in online comedic television clips, (b) reasons individual audience members may enjoy disparagement, and (c) the potential effects that exposure to disparagement humor may have on audience members’ perceptions of themselves and others. Importantly, the content analysis and experiment expanded on previous disparagement humor studies, in which exposure occurred in an isolated environment, by also examining the presence and potential effects of social cues that accompany disparagement humor in mediated environments. The dissertation accomplished these goals. The content analysis showed that disparagement humor is indeed prevalent in online comedic television clips, targeting characters on the basis of race, gender, personality characteristics, and most often physical appearance and weight. Most often, the humor was framed by social validation, in which studio audience members laughed and applauded the content and online viewers posted positive commentary beneath the video clips. If television content truly reflects society, then the online clips examined here provide viewers a portrait of a culture in which being a racial minority, female, or physically different translates into potential ridicule. This was especially the case concerning weight. The media’s endorsement of the so-called “thin ideal” is well documented, as previous content analyses have shown that overweight characters are most often portrayed in a negative light: they are shown eating more often than thin
characters, subjected to ridicule more often than thin characters, and are less likely to be involved in romantic relationships than thin characters. The present analysis builds off the previous work, showing that more often than not disparaging jokes target weight and physical appearance to the tune of social validation — audience applause, character laughter, and online comments in which viewers applaud the derogation and sometimes contribute their own “one-liners” about weight. Importantly, characters who are subjected to such ridicule rarely come to their own defense. Additionally, they should not expect another character or online commenter to come to their defense, as the content analysis found. Given the frequency with which Americans watch television online, and the sheer popularity of the comedic television shows examined here, one may expect that viewers encounter these negative messages concerning physical appearance and weight consistently and repeatedly.

The effects on viewers attitudes toward themselves and others may be staggering, as suggested by theories concerning disparagement humor, and as demonstrated in the experiment conducted in Study 2. Because of the sheer prevalence of weight-based humor reported in the content analysis, Study 2 focused on the reasons people may enjoy the derogation of an overweight person and how it may affect weight-based perceptions of themselves and others. Reinforcing previous disparagement studies, the experiment suggested audience members’ existing biases — in this case anti-fat bias — do in fact significantly and positively predict whether they enjoy tendentious humor. While theorists assumed people enjoy the ridicule of a despised other because they experience a self-esteem boost, this study found no significant evidence for the claim. Nevertheless, the study did provide further empirical support for the proposition that identification with the
joke teller predicts greater enjoyment. While critics contend that disparagement humor nurtures prejudice toward the targeted group, the present experiment and previous research have provided no evidence supporting the claim. Nevertheless, the present research demonstrates the potentially damaging consequences of disparagement humor exposure for an individual’s perceptions of himself/herself. Indeed, the results suggest that viewers who identify with the target of ridicule experience a decrease in self-esteem. The fact that this effect occurred following a single exposure to media content underscores its significance. As cultivation theorists would contend, the mainstream media may be most powerful over the long-term, nurturing associations concerning social groups, characteristics, and values through repeated exposure to homogeneous messages.

Given that the present study found results following an isolated 2-minute exposure to disparagement humor and audience reaction, future research should certainly investigate the potential consequences of long-term exposure to disparaging content. Three additional facts reinforce the need for research into long-term exposure: the college students sampled here frequently watch television (both at home and using portable devices); comedy ranked as the most popular genre among the present sample; and the comedies examined in Study 1 frequently included disparagement humor. Indeed, self-esteem threat may be one of the most important findings of the present research, because it documents a previously unexamined negative consequence of disparagement humor. While ridicule cloaked in comedy may not nurture explicit prejudice, it nevertheless hurts.

As noted in the literature view, social cues are especially powerful when an individual encounters circumstances in which he/she is uncertain. Disparagement humor
certainly presents such an instance, toeing the line between socially inappropriate and humorous. In a thought-listing measure, participants repeatedly expressed conflict over whether they should enjoy the ridicule being unleashed upon the obese teen who plummeted face-first down a slip-n-slide. “Many thoughts came to my mind when I watched the video clip,” wrote one participant, who encountered the disparagement video with *socially validating audience reaction*. “It was funny to watch and the jokes that the host made were funny, but I also remember feeling bad for the guy in the video… I hope to never become that big. All of his friends and family were probably laughing, too.”

Another participant, who watched the *disparagement commentary with no audience reaction*, wrote “The host was funny, but also very rude. He was mean about the fat guy. He basically said what a lot of people would be thinking when they watched the video, but no one else would say it out loud.” While no significant interactions emerged, the experiment did find that participants expressed the greatest enjoyment of the video clip when it was framed using social validation. The finding is especially significant in light of the results of the content analysis, which showed that more often than not disparagement humor is accompanied by social validation, be it through studio audiences, characters themselves, or the commentary of other online viewers. Audience members who are uncertain may look to social cues for help in determining whether they should express enjoyment of disparagement humor. Most often those cues communicate the norm that yes, indeed, the comedic ridicule of an overweight person should be accepted as enjoyable. While disparagement humor may not nurture negative attitudes toward the targeted group after short-term exposure, the results of this dissertation show that it may indeed hurt.
Conclusion

The present research is significant for both practical and theoretical reasons. Practically, the research helps us understand how mediated disparagement humor influences our attitudes, enjoyment, and behavior. The results may inform the debate concerning such humor. Additionally, the study demonstrates the potentially strong influence of audience reaction on how we interpret disparagement humor. How other people respond– including online audiences – may actually influence the way we interpret our experience with disparagement humor.

Theoretically, the studies shed light on an important yet understudied area of mass communications research. Comedy is the most popular genre of American television, reaching millions of people each day through new and syndicated programming, and extending its reach through online environments. Nevertheless, a review of media effects textbooks and journals suggests that comedy receives less empirical attention than dramatic, sexual, and violent programming. This research shows that comedies influence the way that audiences perceive the world, including themselves and other people. Furthermore, the experimental section of the research examined key assumptions underlying theories of disparagement humor, namely the idea that people experience a self-esteem boost when they witness the disparagement of someone they dislike. Finally, the design offered a realistic analysis of disparagement humor. While previous studies had participants read jokes, the design here transferred the research into the 21st century. Overall, the study went beyond the focus on enjoyment and examined the potentially significant consequences of disparagement humor on social perceptions.
Table 1

*Television Shows Coded*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Show</th>
<th>Network</th>
<th>Average Viewership</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 Rock</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>4.5 million</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>4 million</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go On</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>9.3 million</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guys with Kids</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>6.25 million</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Office</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>6.5 million</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks &amp; Recreation</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>4.4 million</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Trust the B in Apt. 23</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>6.4 million</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Middle</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>8.1 million</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Family</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>12.9 million</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Broke Girls</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>11.3 million</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Big Bang Theory</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>15.8 million</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How I Met Your Mother</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>9.7 million</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike &amp; Molly</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>11.5 million</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two and a Half Men</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>14.6 million</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Dad</td>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>5.5 million</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob’s Burgers</td>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>4.2 million</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Kroll Show</td>
<td>CC</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New Normal</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mindy Project</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workaholics</td>
<td>CC</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitney</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>5.1 million</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy Endings</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>6.6 million</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburgatory</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>7.3 million</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising Hope</td>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>5.6 million</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600 Penn</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cleveland Show</td>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>5.5 million</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Guy</td>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>7.3 million</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Girl</td>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>8.2 million</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Burn with Jeff Ross</td>
<td>CC</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Park</td>
<td>CC</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tosh.0</td>
<td>CC</td>
<td>4.2 million</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Viewership averages are based on the 2010-2011 season, when available. Where lines appear, viewership averages were not available.
Table 2

*Coded Items and Reliability*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>$\alpha$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time passed</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV Network</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contain disparagement?</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of disp jokes?</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studio validation</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studio condemnation</td>
<td>No variation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studio mixed</td>
<td>No variation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studio response, overall</td>
<td>No variation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character validation</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character condemnation</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character mixed</td>
<td>No variation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character response, overall</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site allows commentary?</td>
<td>No variation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority commentary?</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall frame</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self/Other derogation</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic of derogation</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studio Response to Joke</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Response to Joke</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Response to Joke</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Weight</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disparager Weight</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Race</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disparager Race</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Age</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disparager Age</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disparager Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Gender</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disparager Gender</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Characters Involved in Disparagement Humor*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Target $(n=346)$</th>
<th>Disparager $(n=346)$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>209 (60%)</td>
<td>254 (73%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>91 (26%)</td>
<td>80 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 1 Person</td>
<td>45 (13%)</td>
<td>12 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>231 (67%)</td>
<td>300 (87%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>27 (8%)</td>
<td>23 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>13 (4%)</td>
<td>1 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>19 (5%)</td>
<td>2 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>17 (5%)</td>
<td>9 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 1 Person</td>
<td>38 (11%)</td>
<td>10 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant</td>
<td>2 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>4 (1%)</td>
<td>10 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen</td>
<td>11 (3%)</td>
<td>9 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>271 (78%)</td>
<td>299 (86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>21 (6%)</td>
<td>18 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 1 Person</td>
<td>37 (11%)</td>
<td>9 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weight</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thin</td>
<td>15 (4%)</td>
<td>52 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>206 (60%)</td>
<td>237 (68%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overweight</td>
<td>70 (20%)</td>
<td>44 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 1 Person</td>
<td>54 (16%)</td>
<td>13 (4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Character Weight & Role In Disparagement Humor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average (N = 443)</th>
<th>Overweight (N = 114)</th>
<th>Significance of proportion differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>206 (46%)</td>
<td>70 (61%)</td>
<td>(z = 2.92^{**})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disparager</td>
<td>237 (53%)</td>
<td>44 (39%)</td>
<td>(z = 2.72^{**})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.** \(* p < .01*
Table 5

*Topic of Disparagement & Prevalence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Appearance</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>346</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6
Audience Responses to Disparagement Jokes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Validation</th>
<th>Mixed</th>
<th>Condemnation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Studio</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Commenter</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7
*Presence of Social Validation & Condemnation Frames*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Validation</td>
<td>142 (91%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condemnation</td>
<td>12  (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>3   (2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8

*Descriptive Statistics for Continuous Measures for Total Sample*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>Skewness (Std. Error)</th>
<th>Kurtosis (Std. Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre Anti-Fat Bias</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>81.22</td>
<td>13.30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>-.310 (.167)</td>
<td>.036 (.333)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Anti-Fat Bias</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>81.58</td>
<td>14.02</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>-.211 (.167)</td>
<td>.106 (.326)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target ID</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>8.85</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>.562 (.167)</td>
<td>-.638 (.333)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disparager ID</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-.066 (.164)</td>
<td>-.683 (.326)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem (n=212)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.3066</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>-7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-.162 (.167)</td>
<td>.245 (.333)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Intent</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>11.79</td>
<td>6.40</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>.921 (.164)</td>
<td>-.105 (.326)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>7.15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>-.127 (.164)</td>
<td>-.605 (.326)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Norm</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>.957</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-1.92 (.164)</td>
<td>6.74 (.326)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 9

**Summary of Intercorrelations for Scores on the Target ID, Disparager ID, Behavioral Intent, Pre-Test Anti-Fat Bias, Post-Test Anti-Fat Bias, Self-Esteem, Enjoyment, and Social Norms for Total Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Target ID</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td>-.148*</td>
<td>-1.55*</td>
<td>-.158*</td>
<td>-.023</td>
<td>.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Disparager ID</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.484†</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>.104</td>
<td>.120</td>
<td>.581†</td>
<td>.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Behavioral Intent</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td>.484†</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.147*</td>
<td>.643†</td>
<td>.188**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Pre Anti-Fat Bias</td>
<td>-.148*</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.822†</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.122</td>
<td>-.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Post Anti-Fat Bias</td>
<td>-.155*</td>
<td>.104</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.822†</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Self-Esteem Change</td>
<td>-.158*</td>
<td>.120</td>
<td>.147*</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.105</td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Enjoyment</td>
<td>-.023</td>
<td>.581†</td>
<td>.643†</td>
<td>.122</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>.105</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.248§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Social Norms</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>.125</td>
<td>.188**</td>
<td>-.021</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>.248§</td>
<td>–</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, †p<.001.*
Table 10

*Between-Subjects Effects from MANOVA Analysis for Treatment Condition*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Validation (n=55)</th>
<th>Condemnation (n=55)</th>
<th>Disparagement, No Audience Commentary (n=55)</th>
<th>Control (n=56)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>22.42&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>6.62</td>
<td>20.23&lt;sup&gt;bb&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>16.53&lt;sup&gt;abc&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>20.89&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>7.32</td>
<td>20.89&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>7.32</td>
<td>16.53&lt;sup&gt;abc&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>346.80</td>
<td>7.36</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Fat Bias</td>
<td>80.10</td>
<td>12.51</td>
<td>80.38</td>
<td>83.01</td>
<td>80.38</td>
<td>13.66</td>
<td>83.01</td>
<td>14.55</td>
<td>82.80</td>
<td>15.32</td>
<td>131.85</td>
<td>.667</td>
<td>.573</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Norms</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>.818</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>.892</td>
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<td>.786</td>
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<td>1.79</td>
<td>.148</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: Post-hoc analyses using Least Significant Differences indicated significant differences between the control condition and three other conditions – validation, condemnation, and disparagement without audience commentary. Conditions sharing a single letter indicate p<.001, and conditions sharing a double letter indicate p<.01.
Figure 1

*Simple slopes analysis for enjoyment and social norm on behavioral intention*
APPENDIX A: Coding Protocol for Study 1

V1: Coder Identification (Coders should indicate whether they’re Scott or another person helping with the coding).
   0 = Scott
   1 = Caroline

V2: Television Program (Coders should indicate the television show they are coding.)

V3: Clip Name ______________________ (If clip name not given, please provide brief synopsis).

V4: How many views? ____________ (N/A when information unavailable)

V5: How many likes? _____________ (N/A when information unavailable)

V6: How long has the video been posted?
   0 = Less than 1 week
   1 = 1 to 2 weeks
   2 = 2 to 3 weeks
   3 = 3 to 4 weeks
   4 = 4 or more weeks
   5 = N/A

V7: Date video coded _____________

V8: Day of week video coded _____________

V9: Television Network or Cable Channel
   0 = CBS
   1 = NBC
   2 = ABC
   3 = Fox
   4 = Comedy Central

V10: Does the clip contain disparagement humor? (Coders should indicate the presence/absence of humorous communication in which an individual or group verbally demeans, insults, puts down, or otherwise disparages another person. Not everyone will find jokes humorous, and we’re not interested in hostile comments that are not meant to
be funny. Therefore, coders should be on alert for indications that the person intends to be humorous, such as a lighthearted tone of voice, a smile, etc.)

0 = No
1 = Yes

V11. How many disparagement jokes does the clip contain?
0 = 0
1 = 1
2 = 2
3 = 3
4 = 4
5 = 5 or more

V12: How many jokes in the clip were VALIDATED by the STUDIO audience?
0 = 0
1 = 1
2 = 2
3 = 3
4 = 4
5 = 5 or more

V13: How many of the jokes were CONDEMNED by the STUDIO audience?
0 = 0
1 = 1
2 = 2
3 = 3
4 = 4
5 = 5 or more

V14: How many jokes drew MIXED responses from the STUDIO audience?
0 = 0
1 = 1
2 = 2
3 = 3
4 = 4
5 = 5 or more

V15: What was the predominant STUDIO AUDIENCE response?
0 = Mixed
1 = Validation
2 = Condemnation
3 = No Response

V16: How many jokes in the clip were VALIDATED by OTHER CHARACTERS?
0 = 0
1 = 1
2 = 2
3 = 3
4 = 4
5 = 5 or more

V17: How many jokes in the clip were CONDEMNED by OTHER CHARACTERS?
0 = 0
1 = 1
2 = 2
3 = 3
4 = 4
5 = 5 or more

V18: How many jokes in the clip drew MIXED RESPONSES from OTHER CHARACTERS?
0 = 0
1 = 1
2 = 2
3 = 3
4 = 4
5 = 5 or more

V19: What was the predominant response from OTHER CHARACTERS?
0 = Mixed
1 = Validation
2 = Condemnation
3 = No Response

V20: Does the site allow viewer commentary? (Comments are most often clearly labeled. Check immediately beneath the video. If you don’t see written statements, check to see whether there’s a tab that says “Comment.”)
0 = No
1 = Yes
V21: If comments are allowed, how many viewers commented? ____________ (Count comments even when they are irrelevant to the particular clip. For example, people sometimes insult others based on comments they made. It doesn’t specifically address the clip, but it still counts as commentary.

V22: How many of the VIEWER comments CONDEMN the content? (Now we’re interested in comments that specifically challenge the video content. Nevermind the ones that say “Idiots, why are you showing ads?!” We’re interested in clips that challenge the premise of the content. For example, someone may challenge a character by saying “This guy’s ignorant.” Or they may directly challenge the program, saying “This is ignorant.” Simply indicate the number for future reference: __

V23: How many of the VIEWER comments VALIDATE the content? ____________ (Count the number of comments that applaud the humor, label the content hilarious or funny or using positive jargon such as LOL and LMFAO).

V24: Based on the previous two questions, which outnumbers the other?
   0 = Validation
   1 = Condemnation
   2 = No response

V25: Does one clearly represent a majority?
   0 = No
   1 = Validation
   2 = Condemnation
   3 = No Response

V26: Overall, what’s the predominant frame for the video content?
   0 = Mixed
   1 = Validation
   2 = Condemnation

Coders answer the following questions for each joke.

V27: Please transcribe the joke in the space provided. ____________________ (Please write down – word for word – the disparagement humor remark.)
V28: Please indicate whether the joke is “self-deprecating” or “other-deprecating” (Self-deprecating humor occurs when an individual insults himself/herself. Other-deprecating humor occurs when one person targets another person or group with the disparaging remark.)

0 = Self
1 = Other

V29: What is the topic of insult? (Please indicate the topic of disparagement. Did the joker make fun of another person because he/she is fat? Old? Gay? Black? Lacking intelligence? If you’re unsure, please mark the box “Other” and provide a one-word description in the space provided.)

0 = Weight
1 = Intelligence
2 = Race/Ethnicity
3 = Gender
4 = Age
5 = Sexual Orientation
6 = Other __________________

V30: How does the “studio” audience respond? (While it’s unlikely you will see the television audience, you should hear their reaction (or lack thereof) following each disparaging joke.)

0 = No response
1 = Condemnation (boos, verbalizations of disgust)
2 = Canned laughter
3 = Applause
4 = Canned laughter and applause
5 = Mixed (laughter followed by disgust)

V31: When the joke-teller delivers the disparaging comment, how do characters besides the joker and target respond? (We’re not interested in the joke teller, targeted character, or studio audience at this point. Instead, we’re interested in how other characters in the plot respond.)

0 = No response
1 = Smile
2 = Laughter
3 = Sympathy (or coming to the defense) of the target
4 = Mixed responses
**V32: When the target receives the insult, how does he/she respond?** *(Now we’re interested in the target’s reaction. How does the person take the humor, verbally)*

- 0 = No response
- 1 = Responds with an insult
- 2 = Defends self through means other than insult
- 3 = Laughs along with joke
- 4 = other (such as tears)
- 5 = Mixed response (in other words, the lone target responds in more than one manner; when more than one person is targeted, they respond differently).

**V33: How would you describe the target’s weight?** *(Please indicate the number for the depiction that best represents the character’s body shape, using the figures provided below.)*

- 0 = thin
- 1 = average
- 2 = overweight

V34: How would you describe the disparager’s weight?

- 0 = thin
- 1 = average
- 2 = overweight

**V35: What is the target’s race?** *(Since we’re dealing with television characters who will probably not explicitly state their race, you’re basing your decision on the skin color, hair color, and facial features of characters. A character’s race may also be suggested by their name. For example, a Hispanic character may have the last name of Gomez, Sanchez, or Rodriguez. An Asian person may have a last name of Chen, Li, Yu, or Nguyen. If you’re unsure of a character’s race, code it as ‘4,’ which stands for ‘Other.’)
0 = White
1 = Black
2 = Asian
3 = Hispanic
4 = Other

V36: What is the disparager’s race?
0 = White
1 = Black
2 = Asian
3 = Hispanic
4 = Other
5 = White

V37: What is the target’s age? (Age will be defined in broad terms which should be readily apparent based on the character’s appearance and/or dialogue concerning the character. An infant is a baby. The term ‘child’ includes toddlers (who can walk and/or talk) and elementary age youths. ‘Teen’ involves youths between ages 12 and 17 who would attend middle school or high school. ‘Young adult’ includes people between 18 and 25, or college-aged individuals. ‘Adult’ includes people who are between ages 26 and 65. ‘Senior’ includes adults who appear 65 years and older.)
0 = Infant
1 = Child
2 = Teen
3 = Adult
4 = Senior

V38: What is the disparager’s age?
0 = Infant
1 = Child
2 = Teen
3 = Adult
4 = Senior

V39: What is the target’s sexual orientation? (Since sexual orientation is something you cannot determine on appearance alone, we must base our decision on either the character’s explicit behavior or statements. A man kissing a man does not necessarily represent a homosexual act. However, a man romantically kissing another man may be. Similarly, being labeled by another person as “gay” does not necessarily mean a person is homosexual.)
V40: **What is the disparager’s sexual orientation?**
- 0 = Heterosexual
- 1 = Homosexual
- 2 = Bisexual
- 3 = Not sure

V41: **What is the target’s gender?** *(Gender should be readily apparent based on the characters’ speech, clothing, hairstyle, facial hair and other characteristics. However, you may encounter instances in which you are unsure of a character’s gender, or instances in which an individual is transgender. In such cases, mark ‘2’ on the coding sheet for transgender and ‘3’ when you are simply unsure.)*
- 0 = Male
- 1 = Female
- 2 = Transgender
- 3 = Unsure

V42: **What is the disparager’s gender?**
- 0 = Male
- 1 = Female
- 2 = Transgender/other
- 3 = Unsure
APPENDIX B: Sample Coding Sheet

1: Coder Identification ___

2: Television Program ________________________________

3: Clip Name __________________________

4: How many views? __________

5: How many likes? _____________

6: How long has the video been posted? ____

7: Date video coded _____________

8: Day of week video coded _____________

9: Television Network or Cable Channel

10: Does the clip contain disparagement humor? ______

    <<< If clip contains no disparagement humor, move on to next video >>>

11. How many disparagement jokes does the clip contain? ______

12. How many jokes in the clip were VALIDATED by the STUDIO audience? _____

13. How many of the jokes were CONDEMNED by the STUDIO audience?______

14. How many jokes drew MIXED responses from the STUDIO audience? _____

15. What was the predominant STUDIO AUDIENCE response? _____

16. How many jokes in the clip were VALIDATED by OTHER CHARACTERS? _____

17. How many jokes in the clip were CONDEMNED by OTHER CHARACTERS? ____
18. How many jokes in the clip drew MIXED RESPONSES from OTHER CHARACTERS? _____

19. What was the predominant response from OTHER CHARACTERS? ______

20. Does the site allow viewer commentary? ______

21. If comments are allowed, how many viewers commented? __________

22. How many of the VIEWER comments CONDEMN the content? __________

23. How many of the VIEWER comments VALIDATE the content? __________

24. Based on the previous two questions, which outnumbers the other? ______

25. Does one clearly represent a majority? ______

26. Overall, what’s the predominant frame for the video content? ______

Answer the following questions for each joke. Use more than one sheet of paper if necessary. >>>

27. Please transcribe the joke in the space provided.
____________________________________________________
____________________________________________________

28. Please indicate whether the joke is “self-deprecating” or “other-deprecating” ___

29. What is the topic of insult? ____

30. How does the “studio” audience respond? ______

31. When the joke-teller delivers the disparaging comment, how do characters besides the joker and target respond? ______

32. When the target receives the insult, how does he/she respond? ______

33. How would you describe the target’s weight? ______
34. How would you describe the *disparager’s* weight? ______

35. What is the *target’s* race? ______

36. What is the *disparager’s* race? ______

37. What is the *target’s* age? ______

38. What is the *disparager’s* age? ______

39. What is the *target’s* sexual orientation? ______

40. What is the *disparager’s* sexual orientation? ______

41. What is the *target’s* gender? ______

42. What is the *disparager’s* gender? ______
APPENDIX C: Attitudes Toward Obese Persons Scale

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement, using the scale provided.

1 Strongly Disagree
2 Disagree
3 Somewhat Disagree
4 Neither Agree nor Disagree
5 Somewhat Agree
6 Agree
7 Strongly Agree

1. ______ Obese people are as happy as nonobese people.
2. ______ Most obese people feel that they are not as good as other people.
3. ______ Most obese people are more self-conscious than other people.
4. ______ Obese workers cannot be as successful as other workers.
5. ______ Most nonobese people would not want to marry anyone who is obese.
6. ______ Severely obese people are usually untidy.
7. ______ Obese people are usually sociable.
8. ______ Most obese people are not dissatisfied with themselves.
9. ______ Obese people are just as self-confident as other people.
10. ______ Most people feel uncomfortable when they associate with obese people.
11. ______ Obese people are often less aggressive than nonobese people.
12. ______ Most obese people have different personalities than nonobese people.
13. ______ Very few obese people are ashamed of their weight.
14. ______ Most obese people resent normal weight people.
15. ______ Obese people are more emotional than nonobese people.
16. ______ Obese people should not expect to lead normal lives.
17. ______ Obese people are just as healthy as nonobese people.
18. ______ Obese people are just as sexually attractive as nonobese people.
19. ______ Obese people tend to have family problems.
20. ______ One of the worst things that could happen to a person would be for him to become obese.

SOURCE: Yale Rudd Center
APPENDIX D: Weight-based identification

Please indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statements using the scale provided (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree)

I identify with people who are overweight.
I see myself as overweight.
I feel strong ties with people who are overweight.

SOURCE: Doosje, Ellemers & Spears, 1995
APPENDIX E: Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale

Participants indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following statements, using a 4-point scale including “Strongly Agree=4,” “Agree=3,” “Disagree=2,” and “Strongly Disagree=1.”

1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
6. I take a positive attitude toward myself.
7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
9. I certainly feel useless at times.
10. At times I think I am no good at all.
APPENDIX F: Media use and Demographic Information

In a typical week, how many days do you watch television?
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7

On a typical **weekday** (excluding Friday, Saturday, Sunday), how much time do you spend watching television?
Less than 30 minutes
30 minutes to 1 hour
1 hour, 1 minute to 1 hour 30 minutes
1 hour, 31 minutes to 2 hours
2 hours, 1 minute to 2 hours 30 minutes
3 or more hours

On a typical **Friday**, how much time do you spend watching television?
Less than 30 minutes
30 minutes to 1 hour
1 hour, 1 minute to 1 hour 30 minutes
1 hour, 31 minutes to 2 hours
2 hours, 1 minute to 2 hours 30 minutes
3 or more hours

On a typical **Saturday**, how much time do you spend watching television?
Less than 30 minutes
30 minutes to 1 hour
1 hour, 1 minute to 1 hour 30 minutes
1 hour, 31 minutes to 2 hours
2 hours, 1 minute to 2 hours 30 minutes
3 or more hours

On a typical **Sunday**, how much time do you spend watching television?
Less than 30 minutes
30 minutes to 1 hour
1 hour, 1 minute to 1 hour 30 minutes
1 hour, 31 minutes to 2 hours
2 hours, 1 minute to 2 hours 30 minutes
3 or more hours

How many days a week do you generally watch television online through network sites, Hulu, and Netflix online (not the DVD version)?

0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7

Please indicate the frequency with which you use the following media to watch TV shows: (0=never to 7=all the time)

Internet (including Hulu, social media, online version of Netflix)
Live and/or recorded television (including DVR)
DVD (Redbox, Blockbuster, the DVD version of Netflix)

In an average week, how often would you say you watch a television clip or entire show using a hand-held device such as an i-Phone?

Never
1 day
2 days
3 days
4 days
5 days
6 days
Every day

How often do you watch television clips on a laptop computer or tablet?

Never
1 day
2 days
3 days
4 days
5 days
6 days
Every day

In an average week, how often do you use Facebook?
   Never
   1 day
   2 days
   3 days
   4 days
   5 days
   6 days
   Every day

How often do you share videos using social media? (This could include sharing YouTube videos or TV clips with Facebook friends, linking to videos via Twitter, etc.)
   Never
   Occasionally
   Often

How often do you watch videos that were shared by others on social media?
   Never
   Occasionally
   Often

Please indicate how often you watch each of the following genres of television (scale of 0=never to 7=all the time)
   Documentary
   Courtroom drama
   Medical drama
   Comedy
   News
   Game show
   Police procedural
   Reality
   Soap opera
   Religious broadcasting
   Science fiction
   Horror
How often do you watch each of the following television programs? (scale of 0 = never to 7 = all the time)

- Daily Show with Jon Stewart
- Colbert Report
- Tosh.0
- Southpark
- Workaholics
- Sunday night football
- Monday night football
- American Idol
- Voice
- Modern Family
- American Idol
- Big Bag Theory
- Two and a Half Men
- X-Factor
- 2 Broke Girls
- Grey’s Anatomy
- New Girl
- How I Met Your Mother
- Once Upon a Time
- NCIS
- Family Guy
- Mike & Molly
- Criminal Minds
- Glee
- Rob
- Terra Nova
- NCIS: Los Angeles
- Law & Order
- Law & Order Criminal Intent
- Law & Order SVU
- Rules of Engagement
- Simpsons
- CSI
- The Mentalist
- Private Practice
- Bones
- Castle
- Supernatural
American Dad
Parenthood
Raising Hope
Cleveland Show
Biggest Loser
CSI: Miami
The Middle

What is your gender?
   Male
   Female

What is your age?
   18
   19
   20
   21
   22
   23
   24
   25
   Older than 25

What is your race/ethnicity?
   African-American
   Asian
   Caucasian
   Hispanic
   Other

What is your current Grade Point Average?
   Less than 2.00
   2.00 to 2.99
   3.00 to 3.99
   4.00

What is the approximate household income from the home you grew up in?
   Less than $20,000
   Between $20,001 and $40,000
Between $40,001 and $60,000
Between $60,001 and $80,000
Between $80,001 and $100,000
More than $100,001
I’m not sure

Please indicate your political identity.
  Strongly liberal
  Moderately liberal
  Slightly liberal
  Moderate (neutral)
  Slightly conservative
  Moderately conservative
  Strongly conservative

Please indicate the degree of your religiosity.
  I am very religious.
  I am moderately religious.
  I am somewhat religious.
  I am not at all religious.

**After watching the stimulus material, participants answered the following questions:**

Please answer the following questions using this scale: 1=not at all, 7=very
  How entertaining was this clip?
  How involved were you watching this clip?
  How enjoyable was this clip?
  How funny was this clip?
  How disturbing was this clip to watch?
  How familiar are you with the television program?
  How familiar are you with the television host?
  To what extent do you consider the comedian to be like you?

Please rate the following statements using this scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree

  The television clip was funny
  I identify with the host of the television show
  I would watch this show on TV
I would forward this clip to friends (using social media, email, etc).
I would forward this clip to my parents.
I would forward this clip to my co-workers.
I would forward this clip to my professor.
I would share this video with my friends through social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
APPENDIX G: Treatment conditions

Disparagement with socially validating audience reaction
Disparagement with socially condemning audience reaction
Disparagement humor without audience reaction
Original web video without Tosh commentary or audience reaction
References


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