STUDENT HUMOR AND ITS EFFECTS ON TEACHERS'

PERCEPTIONS AND THEIR ANTICIPATED LENIENCY

BEHAVIORS TOWARD STUDENTS

THESIS

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This thesis is dedicated to my gracious grandmother, Mrs. Ruth T. Speight.
Thank you for believing in my abilities and thank you for the tuition.

This thesis is also dedicated to my family, Mom, Dad, Dr. Chrys,
Effie, Steely, and Shelby Lynn. You have made my life
laughable and made me laugh all my life.
Thank you and I love you all.

"The Phred"

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the effects of student humor on teachers' perceptions of

students and their anticipated leniency behaviors. Faculty members (N = 152) serve as

subjects in this study. The independent variables include teacher and perceived student

humor orientations (HO) and the dependent variables include teachers' perceptions of

student credibility (character, competence), interpersonal attraction (task and social), in

addition to anticipated teacher leniency behaviors. Five hypotheses predict that the

interaction between high HO students and high HO teachers will yield enhanced

perceptions of student credibility, interpersonal attraction, in addition to teachers being

more lenient in overlooking student misbehaviors. Although all hypotheses are

unsupported, analyses of variance yield significant interaction and main effects among

four of the five dependent variables. Theoretical and methodological explanations for the

hypothesized and un-hypothesized results are discussed as well as the implications for

teachers. Limitations of the current study and directions for future research are also

addressed.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Research into the role of humor as a communicative tool has been examined for

some time, but has not received a significant amount of attention in any one

communication context. Humor has been used as a persuasive device, a coping device,

and an inclusion device. O'Quin and Aronoff (1981) examined the role of humor in

public negotiations and found it to be a useful communicative tool when attempting to

influence others. Dundes (1987) found that humor was used as a way to cope with a

devastating social threat such as AIDS or an uncontrollable disaster, such as the

explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger*. Dundes found that jokes served as a ventilation

tool for our worst fears. In the interpersonal context, humor was found to function as a

method of including others, controlling others, or showing affection toward others

(Graham, Papa, & Brooks, 1992).

Most recently, Meyer (2000) looked at humor from the perspective of the receiver

or audience and found that humor served four different functions. Identification, the first

function of humor, was described as the process of building relationships between the

speaker and the audience by highlighting similarities. These commonalties between the

sender and receiver helped to establish the credibility of the speaker. Clarification, the

second function of humor, was used to help explain and retain new information through

stories, one-line punch lines, and anecdotes. Enforcement, the third function of humor,

was used to drive social norms while maintaining a relationship with the audience.

Enforcement allowed a speaker to discipline norm breakers while maintaining a sense of identity with the audience. The fourth and final function of humor identified by Meyer (2000) was differentiation. This function of humor allowed a speaker to draw clear alliances as well as distinctions between ideas, individuals, and groups.

After exploring humor in the public setting, instructional communication research began to examine the use of humor in the classroom context and found that the classroom environment benefited from the use of humor in a multitude of ways. Gilliland and Mauritsen (1971), Ziv (1988), and Gorham and Christophel (1990) found that student learning and motivation increased when teachers' used humor as a communicative tool in the classroom environment. Instructional humor was also shown to enhance overall classroom climate (Darling & Civikly, 1987) and reduced classroom tensions (Comeaux, 1995; Scott, 1976; Stuart & Rosenfeld, 1994; Welker, 1977). Frymier and Wanzer (1999) found that teacher humor increased the level of student and teacher shared immediacy. Even student perceptions of their teacher were significantly impacted by the use of teacher humor (Bryant, Comisky, Crane, & Zillmann, 1980). Instructional humor has assisted with general recall and memory of class material (Downs, Javidi, & Nussbaum, 1988; Ziv, 1988). Interestingly enough, negative humor (e.g., using humor to demean or belittle others) has been shown to contribute to teacher job satisfaction (Graham, West, & Schaller, 1992). Graham et al., (1992) explain this by suggesting that teachers may use humor as a way to deal with and discipline common student misbehaviors.

Although all of these examinations of humor in the classroom have added to the instructional communication research, the effects of humor in the classroom remain questionable. Humor has been shown to positively affect student perceived teacher

effectiveness (Bryant, Comisky, Crane, & Zillmann, 1980), and increase student learning (Frymier & Wanzer, 1999; Ziv, 1988). Humor has been shown to negatively affect student perceived teacher effectiveness (Bryant, Comisky, Crane, & Zillmann, 1980), and student perceived teacher communication style (Stuart & Rosenfeld, 1994). These varying results suggest that the effectiveness of humor in the classroom depend on three communication variables including; humor orientation, gender, and type of humor used.

According to Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991), humor orientation pertains to an individual's ability to initiate and engage in humorous messages within a variety of situations. Wanzer and Frymier (1999) found that the interaction between teacher and student humor orientation influenced student cognitive and affective learning. The researchers also found that humor orientation influenced student perceptions of teacher immediacy or perceived psychological closeness, and teacher socio-communicative style including such communication traits as assertiveness and responsiveness. In essence, the humor orientations of teachers and students can interact to positively and/or negatively affect the degree of student learning, the student perceived value of the course material, and the student perceived level of teacher caring.

Another influential factor on humor in the classroom is gender. According to Bryant, Comisky, Crane, & Zillmann (1980), male teachers who engaged in frequent humorous messages in the classroom received higher overall student evaluations. Female teachers who used humor on a regular basis, however, were perceived by their students to be less competent and effective. Darling and Civikly (1987) also examined the relationship between gender and humor in the classroom and found that students reacted defensively to male teachers who engaged in harmless and innocent humor. The

researchers also found that students reacted defensively to female teachers who engaged in the opposite form of humor, which was degrading and aggressive forms of communication.

Finally, the type or kind of humor used was found to be the third influential factor of humor in the classroom. Stuart and Rosenfeld (1994) defined hostile humor as biased or derogatory, and found that this type of humor was often perceived as a psychological attack on another. Nonhostile humor was defined as playful and non-threatening. Stuart and Rosenfeld found that teachers who used hostile humor were characterized as being less supportive of students and as being less organized in the classroom environment. These teachers were also seen as more competitive and defensive and were more closely affiliated with the students. Teachers who used non-hostile humor were characterized as promoting a less innovative classroom climate, but perceived as having greater control over the environment and being very task oriented.

In another study conducted by Frymier and Wanzer (1999) the type of humor used in the classroom was dependent on teacher humor orientation. The researchers examined appropriate and inappropriate forms of humor and found that teachers who were perceived by their students to have a high humor orientation tended to use more appropriate forms of humor such as topic related or unrelated humor, unintentional humor, impersonations, and nonverbal behaviors. High humor oriented teachers were also found to use more inappropriate forms of humor such as sexual humor or stereotypical humor than teachers who were perceived by their students to have a low humor orientation.

To summarize, all of these studies suggest that although male teachers have been perceived as more competent than female teachers when using humor, teachers with a high humor orientation overall were perceived by their students as being more organized, and having greater control over their classrooms. High humor oriented teachers were also perceived by their students to be more supportive, and to use more suitable humor on a regular basis.

One of the limitations of the current instructional communication research examining humor is that the majority of research examines the effects of teacher humor on students. This research reflects the process-product nature of instructional communication. Examining communication in the classroom from a process-product perspective allows the researcher to examine how the teacher and teaching style (i.e., the process), influence the student and student learning (i.e., the product)(Shulman, 1986). In regards to this study, rather than focusing only on how teacher humor influences students and learning, it may also be useful to examine how student humor influences teachers and teaching. This reversal of thinking would help us to understand better the transactional nature of the teacher-student relationship and identify not only the ways teachers influence students, but also the ways students influence teachers. In other words, we know that student learning and motivation increases when teachers' engage in appropriate humorous messages (Gilliland & Mauritsen, 1971; Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Ziv, 1988). What we do not know is how, or if, teachers are affected by their student's humor orientation. This way of examining humor in the classroom has not yet been examined in the instructional communication literature. Other studies have reversed

process-product paradigm into a product-process viewpoint and have examined other student behaviors and their effect on teachers and teaching.

There are three major reasons for refocusing research on the student to teacher relationship. First, there is a scarcity of research examining the effects of student behavior on teachers and their teaching in the instructional communication literature. Brophy and Good (1974) argued that a teacher's behavior toward students was actually a reaction to students' behavior toward the teacher or class. Shulman (1986) suggested that looking at how students influence teachers and their teaching was the next logical step.

Three recent studies set the stage for the current one and add support to the first reason for refocusing the literature. Comstock (1999) examined Burgoon, Stern, and Dillman's (1995) interaction adaptation theory in the classroom to determine the extent to which different levels of student nonverbal involvement impacted teachers' interaction patterns. Comstock found that when students increased or decreased their level of nonverbal involvement, teachers reciprocated by increasing or decreasing their level of nonverbal involvement to mimic the student level of involvement.

Baringer and McCroskey (2000) found that teachers reported being more motivated to teach students whom they perceived as being more immediate. Teachers also reported viewing highly immediate students more positively in various ways. Mottet (2000) examined students' nonverbal responsiveness and found that student nonverbal responsiveness was positively related to how teachers perceived their students. Both of these studies suggest that student behaviors do indeed effect teacher behaviors.

The second reason for this reversal of research is to create a better understanding of the transactional nature of the student-teacher relationship. Watzlawick, Beavin, and

Jackson's (1967) identified communication as a transactional process involving both content and relational issues. Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson argued that during any given dialogue all parties involved simultaneously send and receive information pertaining to the content of the message as well as the degree of liking and/or attraction between the parties. Similarly, Nussbaum (1992) argued that teaching and learning should be examined as a transactional and reciprocal process of communication between teachers and students. Nussbaum suggested that examining the teacher-student relationship would allow for a better understanding of the relational issues between the teacher and student. Although the current study does not examine communication as a transactional process, it does come somewhat closer to the transactional nature of communication by examining how teachers perceive student humor and how teachers' and students' humor orientations may interact to influence how teachers perceive students.

The third reason for this reversal in research is the benefit of enabling teachers to better understand how student humor may be influential in the classroom. Humor has been shown to be influential in social relationships (O'Quin & Aronoff, 1981; Meyer, 2000) and student behavior has been shown to affect teacher behavior in a number of areas (Mottet & Richmond, in press). Examining how students may influence teachers and their teaching synthesizes these two areas of research. Knowing how influential humor can be and realizing how it can effect the teaching process will educate and enable current and future teachers to better understand and control one more influential factor within the learning environment.

The purpose of this study was to reverse the process-product paradigm of research. This study was completed to extend the body of instructional communication research examining humor by focusing on how perceived student humor orientation may interact with a teacher's humor orientation and ultimately influence teachers and their teaching. Specifically, this study examined how teacher perceived student humor influenced teachers' perceptions of students and how these perceptions affected anticipated teacher behavior in terms of teachers' leniency in overlooking student misbehaviors.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This thesis argues that student humor functions as a relational variable in the instructional context influencing how teachers' perceive students and their anticipated leniency behaviors toward students. To support this argument, the review of literature reviews research related to four claims needed to support the argument:

Claim 1:   Student communication behaviors influence the perceptions teachers form of students.

Claim 2:   Humor functions as a relational variable.

Claim 3:   Humor is a personality variable that influences how we use and interpret humor.

Claim 4:   Perceptions of credibility and interpersonal attraction are important relational variables in the instructional context.

This thesis argues that teachers will perceive student humor positively and that these perceptions will enhance relational perceptions in the classroom context (credibility, interpersonal attraction). These enhanced relational perceptions will ultimately influence anticipated teacher leniency in terms of overlooking student misbehaviors.

Five domains of research literature are reviewed. The first domain examines the communication research that focuses on how student communication behaviors such as immediacy and nonverbal responsiveness influence teachers and their teaching. The

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second domain reviews the literature exploring how humor functions as a relational variable in a variety of contexts including negotiations, interpersonal relationships, small group communication, and rhetorical communication. The third domain explores humor as a personality variable and the different facets of an individual's humor orientation. The fourth domain of research examines how teachers in the classroom context have used humor. Teachers' willingness to use humor, types of instructional humor, its effects on student learning, and how humor influences the classroom climate are examined in this domain. The fifth, and final domain reviews the literature examining the role of credibility and interpersonal attraction in the instructional context. Before delving into the research literature, some definitional and conceptualization issues are examined.

<u>Definitions and Conceptualizations of Humor</u>

Humor research has yielded numerous and sometimes contradictory results primarily because the construct has numerous and various definitions. Some define and conceptualize humor from a receiver perspective. Frymier and Wanzer (1999) defined humorous communication as being light-hearted, amusing, mirth-laden, and fun. The researchers identified specific forms of humor such as sarcasm, jokes, stories, impersonations, nonverbal behaviors, and props. They also argued that humor could be intentional as well as unintentional verbal topic-related and off-topic messages. Darling and Civikly (1987) categorized humor as hostile or non-hostile. Hostile humor was found to be derogatory and ridiculing in nature while nonhostile forms of humor were identified as being more playful and innocent in intent. Both of the definitions mentioned above can be explained as how someone hearing or receiving a humorous message could decode or interpret that message, either positively or negatively.

Some define and conceptualize humor from a source perspective. In other words, some researchers have looked at humor from the perspective of the individual creating the humorous message. Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (1995) were the first researchers to emphasize a source orientation to humorous communication. They extended a previous study by Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) and conceptualized humor as intentional on the source's part. The purpose of the Wanzer, et al. (1995) study was to examine the cognitive and behavioral differences between individuals who reported being good at producing humorous messages and those who reported being bad at producing humorous messages. Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) defined humor enactments as verbal or nonverbal messages that elicited laughter, giggling, or some other pleasurable response associated with delight and/or surprise.

Others define and conceptualize humor from a rhetorical perspective. From this perspective messages are transacted in such a way to serve a particular function. An example of this can be found in a study by Dundes (1987). This researcher examined "sick" humor and found it to function as a defense mechanism that allowed people to cope with major, uncontrollable disasters such as the 1986 space shuttle *Challenger* explosion and the AIDS epidemic. In addition to serving as a coping mechanism, humor has also been found to serve as a persuasive or rhetorical mechanism. According to Meyer (2000), humor functioned in four different ways: identification, clarification, enforcement, and differentiation. Meyer argued that often the only proof that a rhetorical message was successfully humorous comes from the reaction of the receiver. If the

receiver decodes the humorous attempt as funny and laughs in response, the sender was successful in his/her attempt at humor.

Based on the past conceptualizations of humor, the current study defines humor as a generally pleasurable message that can be expressed either verbally or nonverbally. The way in which an individual chooses to express humor can vary and includes any of the following: jokes, anecdotes, stories, sarcasm, impersonations, and the use of props. One important aspect of humor to remember is that it can have a dark side when used to degrade or ridicule others. For the purposes of this study, however, we will be examining only light-hearted, non-hostile humor. Having reviewed three different conceptualizations and perspectives of humor (i.e., receiver, source, and rhetorical), the first domain of literature switches gears and examines how students have been found to influence teachers and their teaching.

Students' Influence on Teachers

The paragraphs that follow review the research literature examining how student communication behaviors have been shown to influence teacher perceptions and to ultimately influence their behaviors. This domain reviews research literature from both the education and communication disciplines. Although most of the studies focus on teacher perceptions, Burgoon, Stern, and Dillman's (1995) theory of interpersonal adaptation and Comstock's (1999) application of this theory to the classroom, reveal how student communication behaviors ultimately influence not only teacher perceptions, but also teacher behaviors. This study remains important to this thesis since the final domain of the literature review suggests that teachers' perceptions of student communication behaviors ultimately influence how they behave toward students.

Students have been shown to influence teachers and their teaching. Brophy and Good (1974) originally argued that a teacher's behavior or action toward students was actually a reaction to the students' behavior toward the teacher or class. Natriello and Dornbusch (1983) examined the relationship between general student characteristics such as age and sex, and teacher behavior. The researchers found that teacher behavior was affected more by immediate student behaviors (including their communication behavior), than by demographics. Madon, Jussim, Keiper, Eccles, Smith, and Palumbo (1998) found that teachers based their perceptions of students more on individual characteristics such as student achievement, motivation, and level of performance and less on group stereotypes of the whole class. For example, a teacher would be much more affected by one student who regularly sought clarification of course material, than by a below average class test mean.

Brooks and Woolfolk (1987) examined student nonverbal behavior and its effects on teachers and their teaching. They found that proxemics, attentiveness, and chronemics all influenced teachers' perceptions of students. The first influential factor was identified as proxemics, the study of how people use space. The distance between a student's seat and the teacher's desk on the first day of class influenced the teacher's initial perception of that student. For example, a student who chose to sit close to the teacher on the first day of class was perceived as being more engaged and concerned with the course material. The student was also perceived as being more attentive to the teacher and considered more likeable by the teacher than those students who chose not to sit near the teacher on the first day of class.

The second influential factor was identified as student attentiveness. Brooks and Woolfolk (1987) argued that teacher perceived student attentiveness influenced how teachers perceived student competence. The researchers found that when student's sat up straight, leaned their body forward, maintained eye contact, nodded their head, and smiled, the teacher perceived greater student competence than when student's did not engage in those behaviors. The third and final influential factor was identified as chronemics, the study of time. Teachers perceived their students negatively when they tended to interrupt the class or instructor at the wrong time and/or made requests at inappropriate times.

To examine how student behavior affected teacher behavior, Comstock (1999) tested Burgoon, Stern, and Dillman's (1995) interaction adaptation theory in the instructional context. Burgoon et al's interaction adaptation theory suggested that individuals naturally adapted their own communication style to the style of the person(s) to whom they were speaking. To better understand this concept, imagine two students about to engage in conversation over a recent test grade. Student "A," who is clearly excited and happy about her test grade, runs up to student "B" to tell him she earned a score of 100% on her exam. As she approaches she notices student "B" slouched over, arms wrapped tightly to his chest, looking upset. Almost instantly and without real thought student "A" slows her pace and approaches student "B" quietly. Instead of shouting her high score and going on about her excitement at such a high grade, she adapts her communication to simply ask how he was feeling and she comments about how difficult the test was. In this scenario student "A" adapted her excited communication style to a much more subdued version when talking with her classmate.

Burgoon, Stern, and Dillman (1995) argued that individuals were "predisposed to adaptation" (p.264). In fact, the researchers found that adaptation occurred with high regularity within conversation across all contexts and situations. The reoccurring patterns were instrumental in defining and maintaining interpersonal relationships. An individual's choice of interaction patterns had real and practical consequences for immediate interaction and for what followed. Some facilitated smooth, comfortable interaction while others created cycles of misunderstanding, discomfort, or aggression.

Taken into the instructional environment, Comstock (1999) discovered when students increased their nonverbal involvement, teachers reacted by increasing their nonverbal involvement. Similarly, as students lowered their amount of classroom involvement, so did teachers. Comstock's research demonstrated the transactional quality of instructional communication. In other words, teacher behaviors were significantly impacted by student behaviors.

Baringer and McCroskey (2000) examined how student immediacy behaviors affected teachers. Immediacy behaviors are verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors that promote relational liking between individuals. For example, during a lecture to a class of students, the instructor could create nonverbal immediacy by moving from behind the podium and talking a bit closer to the audience, while maintaining an appropriate and comfortable distance. Immediacy was originally defined by Mehrabian (1969, 1971) as any verbal or nonverbal communication behavior that enhances closeness between individuals. The immediacy theory suggested that individuals were drawn to others whom they perceive to be most like them. Immediacy remains an important communicative tool in the classroom because the degree of liking between teachers and

students can affect student learning. Afterall, if a student perceives that a teacher does not like him/her, the student is less likely to approach that teacher for help and ultimately the student grade could be effected.

Baringer and McCroskey (2000) found that students, who were perceived as more immediate by teachers, were also perceived as being more credible and more interpersonally attractive. Teachers reported a higher feeling of general affect toward highly immediate students and projected the immediate students to have greater success in the present class and future classes than less immediate students. Baringer et al. (2000) also found that teachers reported being more motivated to teach those students whom they perceived as being more immediate. In other words, teachers found it more enjoyable to teach a group of students who maintained eye-contact, sat up straight in their chairs, leaned forward, smiled, and asked topic-related questions than teaching students who did not engage in such activities.

Mottet (2000) examined teachers' perceptions of students' nonverbal responsiveness. According to Mottet, nonverbal responsiveness is just one of two smaller constructs that make up the larger construct of immediacy. Nonverbal responsiveness was defined as nonverbal communication that was perceived to be "helpful, sympathetic, compassionate, responsive to others, and friendly" (p.7). Mottet found that students' nonverbal responsiveness was positively related to how teachers perceived their students in terms of student competence, quality of teacher-student relationships, teaching effectiveness, teaching satisfaction, and desire to teach in the interactive television classroom.

Nonverbal behaviors such as immediacy and responsiveness were not the only student behaviors found to influence teachers and their teaching. Students' verbal communication traits (e.g., level of fear of communicating and amount of communication) have also been found to influence teacher perceptions of students. Communication apprehension (CA) is "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1977, 1978). Willingness to communicate (WTC) refers to "an individual's predisposition to initiate communication with others" (McCroskey & Richmond, 1998, p 120). A student's level of communication apprehension and/or willingness to communicate have implications in the classroom. McCroskey and Richmond (1998) examined teacher perceptions of student ability based on students' willingness to communicate and their communication apprehension. The researchers found that teachers perceived low WTC and/or high CA students as less intelligent and expected these students to do less favorably than students who were more talkative.

The preceding paragraphs have reviewed some of the research findings about how teachers are influenced by student nonverbal and verbal behaviors. The findings help build the argument that students' use of humor may be influential over the teaching process. The second domain of literature investigates humor as a relational variable. In this domain, the use of humor will be examined in a variety of contexts. The individual characteristics of those who use humor will also be reviewed.

Humor as a Relational Variable

Before examining the research literature that focuses on humor in the instructional context (which will be reviewed in the fourth domain), it is important to first, understand

the complexities of humor and how it functions and second, understand some of the individual characteristics that influence humor use and interpretation. The research literature supports the claim that humor functions as a relational variable, however not always in a constructive or pro-social manner. To understand the complexities of humor in general, the following paragraphs review how humor has been shown to function in a variety of contexts and also the individual characteristics that influence humor use and how it is interpreted.

Humor in contexts. Humor as a relational variable has been examined in a variety of contexts including public negotiations, interpersonal relationships, small groups, and rhetorical communication. O'Quin and Aronoff (1981) investigated humor in public negotiations. The researchers manipulated humor by introducing it at the end of the negotiation process. The no humor condition was introduced by the confederate stating "Well, my final offer is $_____," while the humorous condition was introduced when the confederate stated "Well, my final offer is $_____, and I'll throw in my pet frog."

O'Quin and Aronoff (1981) found salespersons that employed humor during negotiations experienced greater financial compliance from their associates than salespersons that did not employ humor. O'Quin and Aronoff also found that the associate or buyer reported greater liking toward the task of negotiating a price than buyers who were exposed to lower levels of humor. Obviously humor has some persuasive effects.

In interpersonal and group situations, Graham, Papa, and Brooks (1992) were interested in identifying how individuals used humor to fulfill specific social functions. Graham et al. (1992) found individuals to use humor in three different ways. The first

was identified as positive affect, or an attempt to create identification with another person(s). This function of humor was used when attempting to initiate friendships and is generally light-hearted and playful. The second was identified as negative affect, or gaining control over another person or situation. This function of humor was used to degrade or ridicule others by making antisocial comments. The third was identified as simple expression or showing affection for another individual and/or self-disclosing to him/her. Individuals who feel a need to share their emotions or feelings with others generally used this function of humor.

Honeycutt and Brown (1998) examined the use of humor in marital relationships. Specifically, the researchers examined the use of humor within three types of marriages. The first type of marriage was labeled traditional. Couples in traditional marriages lived together (sharing close space), had limited personal space and generally had a high degree of sharing. The second type of marriage was labeled independent. Couples in independent marriages were more likely to invite change and encourage greater personal space. Independent couples also confronted conflict more as opposed to avoiding it. The third type of marriage was labeled separate and these couples were characterized as physically and psychologically distant.

Honeycutt and Brown (1998) conceptualized humor as jokes, stories, anecdotes, or words that were spoken and know only to the married couple. This study was an extension of Honeycutt's earlier research about imagined interaction. According to Honeycutt and his colleagues (1989, 1992, 1995), humor use could be related to rehearsal of jokes, which in turn could be associated with imagined interaction. Imagined interaction has been conceptually defined as the act of communicating or talking to

oneself and imagining the other person's reaction. Honeycutt argued that this intrapersonal communication helped individuals better understand their own communication style.

Honeycutt and Brown (1998) found that traditional couples used humor to a greater extent than independent or separate couples in an attempt to make a relational connection to their partner. The researchers also found that married persons did not feel a need to rehearse a joke for perfection before sharing it with their partner. Finally, Honeycutt and Brown discovered that males (husbands) used humor as a self-presentation method, whereas females (wives) used humor to increase the level of intimacy in the marriage.

From a message perspective, Meyer (2000) found four potential functions of humor in messages: identification, clarification, enforcement, and differentiation. Meyer defined identification as using humor to highlight the similarities between a speaker and his/her audience. Identifying humor relieved tension and helped the audience relate to the sender. Clarification was defined as using humor to explain information to a receiver. Clarifying humor could be used through anecdotes, one-liners, and/or short phrases to highlight social norms and encourage good feelings between the sender and receiver. Enforcement was defined as using humor to force social norms by disciplining norm breakers through humor. Enforcing humor maintained the relationship and identity between sender and receiver while punishing the violators. Finally, differentiation was defined as using humor to contrast viewpoints, groups, or individuals. Differentiating humor allowed the source to make alliances and distinctions between his/her message and another message. Meyer ultimately found humor to serve a dual function, as a unifier of

similarities and as a divider of differences. Meyer contended that communicators used humor to either bring the audience closer together or divide them further apart.

Individual characteristics that influence humor use and interpretation. The second part of this domain examines the individual characteristics of the people who employ humor. Humor has been found to be a communication tool mostly appreciated by adults (Weaver, Zillmann, & Bryant, 1988). According to Weaver et al. (1988) elementary school children found messages containing little to no humor as most understandable, while messages containing misleading humor, irony, and exaggeration of facts as most confusing. The researchers also found that a child's ability to interpret humor did not significantly increase between the 4th and 8th grades. Weaver, Zillmann, and Bryant explained this increase by stating that either the cognitive abilities to correct misinterpretations were over estimated or the older children simply lacked an interest to pay attention to humorous messages geared toward the fourth grade children.

Age was not the only individual characteristic that played an influential role in humor. Gender has also been found to be influential. In a study conducted by Futch and Edwards (1999), females were found to interpret ambiguous messages more humorously than males. Comments from males were interpreted by females to be more humorous than comments made by other females. This finding supports previous research from Bryant, Comisky, Crane, and Zillmann (1980) who found that male teachers who used any type of humor they desired (e.g., hostile, nonhostile, aggressive, sexual) to lighten subject matter were perceived as more appealing, more competent, and regarded as better teachers.

Bryant, Comisky, Crane, and Zillmann (1980) also examined female teachers who used humor. They found that students perceived female teachers who employed humorous messages similar to their male counterparts less favorably. Although female teachers benefited just as much as male teachers when using hostile and aggressive humor, only when employing humor that was sexually hostile in nature were female teachers perceived more favorably than male teachers. Bryant et al. (1980) explained these results as a mere extension of the socially expected roles of males and females. In other words, female teachers who employed hostile humor may be viewed as more aggressive and hence more equal to male teachers while females teachers employing nonhostile humor may come across as shy and unsure of themselves.

In a second study conducted by Futch and Edwards (1999), researchers examined the impact of an individual's sense of humor, defensiveness, and gender on his/her interpretation of ambiguous messages. The researchers discovered that although there were no differences found between men and women in their humorous interpretations of ambiguous messages, those interpretations were situationally dependent. Men were found to be more humorous than women. What this means is that the interpretation of an ambiguous message can vary depending on the external factors of a particular situation such as the relationship between the people involved, or the cultural climate of a particular setting.

In this domain, humor as a relational variable was examined in a variety of communication contexts and was found to be persuasive in public negotiations, interpersonally stimulating in traditional marriages, and served a dual function of unifier and divider within the message perspective. Individual differences of those who send and

receive humorous messages was also reviewed. Age and gender were found to have an effect on the successful encoding and decoding of a humorous message.

The third domain of literature extends this discussion by examining humor as a source-oriented personality variable. This domain remains important to the argument for two reasons: (1) it examines and previews how humor was conceptualized and measured in the thesis (which will be reviewed more extensively in Chapter Three), and (2) it provides some insight into those who have a humor orientation. For example, how do high humor-oriented individuals use humor? How do others, who may be similar or dissimilar in humor orientations, perceive them? Gaining insight into these questions furthers our understanding of how humor orientations may interact to influence relational perceptions and potential behaviors.

Humor as a Personality Variable

Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) examined humor from the source perspective and developed the Humor Orientation (HO) scale in an attempt to measure an individual's potential to use humor. The Humor Orientation scale was originally designed as a self-report measure that assessed how often and effectively one uses humor in everyday communication. The scale includes a series of agree/disagree statements such as "my friends would say that I am a funny person" and "I don't tell stories or jokes even when asked to." The subject is requested to respond to the statement on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree. Booth-Butterfield et al. (1991) found the scale to possess both acceptable reliability = .90 and face validity. Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (1995) used the HO scale again and found it to posses a reliability of .92. Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield

(1996) revisited the HO scale as a traditional self-report measure and found it to possess a reliability of .88 and a reliability of .92 when adjusted as an other-report. Finally, Wanzer and Frymier (1999) found the HO scale to have a reliability of a .90 as a self-report and .95 as an other-report.

Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) found that individuals who possessed a high humor orientation (HO) saw many situations in which to employ humor and used many different categories of humor. High HO individuals reported the types of humor used in great detail as opposed to low HO individuals who reported in more general terms and took greater effort to plan and organize a humorous message. Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield suggested that due to the stability and consistency of some individuals to employ humorous messages over an extended period of time, humor orientation was a personality trait as opposed to a by-product of an individual's mood at a specific time.

In an attempt to extend the humor orientation research, Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (1995) were the first researchers to emphasize a source-orientation to humorous communication. Wanzer et al. (1995) found that as individuals self-reported a higher humor orientation, they also reported a higher affective orientation. These same individuals indicated they would react in a humorous way in a variety of situations, with greater adaptability according to the circumstances of the situation, and did this in order to obtain rewarding impressions from others. Wanzer et al. also found that self-reported high humor oriented individuals were perceived as funnier than self-reported low humor oriented individuals.

Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (1996) examined the

relationship between self-reported humor orientation and verbal aggressiveness and how

humorous communication served developing relationships. Results indicated that humor

orientation was not associated with increased verbal aggression. High humor oriented

individuals reported less loneliness, and acquaintances saw them as more humorous.

Wanzer et al. (1996) also found that the higher a person's self-reported HO score, the

more others viewed her/him as humorous; however, an individual's self-report of humor

orientation was not related to how strongly others were attracted to that individual.

Overall, Wanzer et al. found humor orientation to be a positive communication trait.

In this last domain, humor has been examined as a communication trait. Booth-

Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) developed the Humor Orientation Scale, and

with Wanzer in 1995 and in 1996, examined the relationship between humor orientation

and a variety of other personality traits.

Before examining how classroom humor has been examined in the literature, it is

important to review the preceding domains of literature in terms of the argument

articulated in the introduction of this chapter. The first domain examined how student

communication influences teachers and their behaviors toward students. This literature

remains important especially since there remains a paucity of research examining how

students influence teachers. Most education and instructional communication research

examines how teacher communication behaviors influence students and their learning.

The second domain examined humor as a relational variable. Humor remains a complex

relational variable that functions in a variety of ways. Its use and how it is interpreted

remains dependent on a variety of individual characteristics. The third domain examined

humor as personality variable, which extended the second domain. As a personality trait, humor orientation has been shown to influence how individuals use humor and also how others, who may be similar or dissimilar in humor orientations, interpret humor.

The fourth domain placed humor in the instructional context and examined the factors that influence its use and effectiveness in the classroom. It is important to note that all of the classroom studies reviewed in this domain examine humor effectiveness from the students' perspective. How do students perceive teacher humor and how do these perceptions influence student learning and classroom climate. This thesis is not examining this perspective, but in the absence of research examining how teachers perceive student humor, this literature was reviewed to understand further humor in the instructional context.

Humor in the Classroom

Humor in the classroom will be explored by examining four sub domains: teachers' likeliness to use humor, forms of humor used in the classroom, humor and student learning, and finally, humor and the classroom climate.

Teachers likeliness to use humor. A teacher's likeliness to use humor depends on several factors including gender and the level of experience of the teacher. Bryant, Comisky, Crane, and Zillmann (1980) examined the relationship between teacher gender, their use of humor, and students' evaluations of those teachers. The researchers found that male teachers got away with using more general, unspecified humor to lighten classroom subject matter and were perceived by their students to be more competent, more appealing, and regarded in general as better teachers than their female counterparts who engaged in similar forms of general, unspecified humor.

Javidi and Long (1989) found the use of humor was directly related to a teacher's

level of experience in the classroom. Specifically, teachers with three or more years of

experience attempted 6.5 humorous, content-related remarks as opposed to their novice

counterparts who attempted only 1.6 humorous remarks within a 50-minute lecture.

Forms of classroom humor. Downs, Javidi, and Nussbaum (1988) examined two

research questions in their examination of classroom humor. First, they asked if teachers

participated in humor, self-disclosure, and/or narrative within their classroom lectures.

The researchers found that college instructors did employ humorous techniques, self-

disclosure, and narrative within their regular teaching methods. Second, the researchers

wanted to know how "award winning" teachers employed the above mentioned

behaviors. The results of the study indicated that most humor used within the college or

high school classroom was subject related, and college classroom use of humor was more

frequent than high school classroom humor (Downs, Javidi, & Nussbaum, 1988).

Frymier and Wanzer (1999) investigated the appropriate and inappropriate forms

of teacher humor and its impact on student learning and motivation. The researchers

asked students to identify examples of appropriate and inappropriate humor. Appropriate

humor was categorized into eight forms consisting of topic related humor, topic unrelated

humor, nonverbal gestures, unintentional humor, impersonations, humorous props,

sarcasm, and discrediting humor. Inappropriate humor was categorized into ten forms

consisting of kidding about somber issues, jokes based on stereotypes, failed humor,

sexual jokes or stories, irrelevant humor, cursing, sarcasm, personal attacks through

humor, and sick humor. It is important to note that sarcasm and unrelated humor were

found to be appropriate and inappropriate depending on the situation.

Frymier and Wanzer (1999) found that teachers who were perceived by their students as having a high humor-orientation used more appropriate forms of humor than student perceived low humor-oriented teachers. In other words, those teachers perceived to have a high humor orientation used humor to highlight subject material in a very non-threatening and entertaining way. Additionally, students perceived high humor-oriented teachers to be more successful at motivating students and increasing their cognitive and affective learning. Additional findings in the study suggested that high HO teachers were found to use more nonverbal and verbal immediacy behaviors than low HO teachers and finally, low HO teachers used failed humor more frequently than high HO teachers. In other words, attempts to use humor by low humor oriented teachers failed more often than attempts made by high humor oriented teachers.

Hostile and non-hostile forms of humor have also been examined. Darling and Civikly (1987) examined the relationship between teacher humor and student perceptions of their teachers. Darling and Civikly conceptualized hostile humor to be ridiculing or derogatory, nonhostile humor to be playful and innocent, and no humor to be lacking of any form of humor. According to their results, students perceived teachers who used hostile versus nonhostile humor as being more defensive than supportive. For example, teachers who were perceived to use more derogatory types of humor were also perceived to be intimidating. Darling and Civikly also found that teachers who did not use humor in their classrooms were perceived to be more elusive or distant than those teachers who employed either hostile or nonhostile forms of humor.

Similarly, Stuart and Rosenfeld (1994) examined teacher humor and students' perceptions of the class/teacher. The researchers found that teachers who engaged in

hostile humor were characterized as being low in student supportiveness as well as classroom order and organization. Teachers using hostile humor were also seen as high in student affiliation, competitiveness and defensiveness (Stuart & Rosenfeld, 1994).

Humor and learning. Ziv (1988) examined the relationship between teacher use of humor and student learning. He conducted an experimental study in which he compared test results of two different groups enrolled in a college statistics class. Humor served as the independent variable in the experimental group and learning served as the dependent variable in the experimental group and control group. Ziv found that students in the experimental group (i.e., teachers who employed humor) had higher cognitive recall of course information than students in the control group (i.e., teachers who did not employ humor).

Gorham and Christophel (1990) examined the relationship between teachers' use of humor and immediacy to student learning. Students were asked to report on the immediacy behaviors and humor use of their instructors. A student self report instrument measured student learning. Results indicated that students interpret humor differently and that the effects of humor on student learning depend of the student's gender. For example, female students seemed to be less influenced by an instructor's use of humor, but found an instructor's use of anecdotes and stories more appealing than male students.

Overall, Gorham and Christophel (1990) found that highly immediate teachers attempted more humorous messages than less immediate teachers. Low immediate teachers who used hostile humor directed toward the subject matter or course effected student affect (i.e., liking) toward the course and course content. High immediate teaches

who used hostile humor directed toward individual students negatively effected student learning.

Wanzer and Frymier (1999) examined the effects of student's self-results of humor orientation and perceptions of teacher humor orientation on learning. Their study suggested that high HO students reported greater cognitive and affective student learning with a high HO teacher than both low HO and high HO students with a low HO teacher. This finding remains important to the current study because of the suggested interaction effect between student and teacher humor orientation. In addition, high HO teachers were perceived as more immediate than their low HO counterparts.

Humor orientation was also significantly related to a teacher's socio-communicative style. Specifically, high HO teachers were perceived as having a more androgynous communication style. According to Wanzer and Frymier (1999), a person who has an androgynous socio-communicative style can be appropriately assertive (i.e., masculine) and responsive (i.e., feminine).

Humor and classroom climate. Stuart and Rosenfeld (1994) examined teacher humor and the classroom climate and found that teacher use of nonhostile humor led to a less innovative classroom climate. These teachers were perceived as having increased control and being high in task orientation. In terms of the distance education context and the interactive television classroom, Comeaux (1995) found that humor reduced the amount of technology induced stress by students in both the studio and mediated remote classrooms. It is important to note that the use of humor transcended the mediated classroom and that students in both classroom contexts benefited from the teacher's use of humor.

To summarize the fourth and final domain, teachers' use of humor in the classroom has examined likeliness to use humor (Bryant, Comisky, Crane, & Zillmann, 1980; Javidi & Long, 1989), types of humor used (Downs, Javidi, & Nussbaum, 1988; Frymier & Wanzer, 1999), its impact on student learning (Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Wanzer & Frymier, 1999; Ziv, 1988), and the classroom climate (Comeaux, 1995; Stuart & Rosenfeld, 1994).

Although this domain of literature does not directly support the argument articulated in the introduction of this chapter, it does provide additional insight into how humor is perceived in the classroom context. Knowing that perceived teacher humor positively influences learning outcomes in students suggests that perceived student humor may also positively influence how teachers perceive and behave toward students. Additionally, the findings from the Wanzer and Frymier (1999) study suggest that humor effects are dependent on how humor orientations interact with one another. Both of these knowledge claims inform the forthcoming research hypotheses.

Perceived Credibility and Interpersonal Attraction in the Classroom

The fifth and final domain of the literature review examines two variables that have been shown to influence classroom interactions: credibility and interpersonal attraction. In this thesis, it is argued that how teachers perceive student credibility and interpersonal attraction influence how they behave toward their students. This claim is grounded in research literature, which will be reviewed in subsequent paragraphs, examining student perceptions of teacher credibility and interpersonal attraction. Again, in the absence of research examining teacher perceptions of students, this argument is constructed using the research findings from student perceptions of teacher credibility

and interpersonal attraction. This approach to supporting the argument remains less than ideal, but the only alternative available.

Perceived credibility. Credibility has been defined as how believable a source is perceived to be (McCroskey & Richmond, 1996). McCroskey (1966) originally argued that credibility consisted of two different dimensions: competence (how knowledgeable an individual is perceived to be), and character (how honest an individual is perceived to be). McCroskey (1998) argued that a teacher needed to be perceived as high in competence and credibility in order to remain believable and influential over students.

Frymier and Thompson (1992) examined how teachers' affinity-seeking strategies effected students' perceived teacher credibility (competence and character) along with students' motivation to learn. Affinity-seeking strategies have been defined as behaviors a teacher may employ in an attempt to create liking for the topic, class, or teacher on the part of the student (Daly & Kreiser, 1992). Example strategies include sensitivity, dynamism, trustworthiness, and facilitating enjoyment (Bell & Daly, 1984). It is essential to point out the relationship between teacher use of humor and affinity-seeking behaviors. According to Daly and Kreiser (1992) teachers engaged in joke-telling and saying funny things when attempting to facilitate enjoyment. It is obvious from this definition that the use of humor can be seen as an affinity-seeking strategy.

In Frymier and Thompson's (1992) study, the researchers asked undergraduate subjects to review a list of affinity-seeking strategies and identify the strategies they had witnessed their teachers using in the past. Results of the study indicated that affinity-seeking strategies were significantly associated with perceived teacher credibility. In other words, teachers who engaged in frequent affinity-seeking strategies were perceived

by their students to be more credible than teachers who did not engage in frequent affinity seeking strategies. Furthermore, Frymier and Thompson found that perceived teacher credibility used in conjunction with affinity-seeking strategies increased students' motivation to study. These results suggest that teachers who are regarded by their students to have high competence and character and who employ affinity-seeking behaviors are more capable of motivating their students to study than teachers who are perceived to have low competence and character and who do not employ affinity-seeking behaviors.

The results from Frymier and Thompson's (1992) study can be related to the current thesis through the connection between affinity seeking behaviors and humor. In other words, if teachers who employ the affinity-seeking strategy of facilitating enjoyment, which consists of joke-telling and saying funny things, are perceived as more credible than teachers who do not employ affinity seeking strategies, then it can be assumed that teachers who possess a high humor orientation may also be perceived as being more credible. Reversing these results into the current study that examines how students' use of humor may influence teachers and their anticipated behavior toward students, it can be reasonably predicted that students who are perceived to have a high humor orientation may also be perceived as being highly credible.

As mentioned in the introduction, perceived credibility is not the only communication construct that is examined in this domain. The second influential construct is perceived interpersonal attraction. The effects of perceived interpersonal attraction on the instructional context are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Perceived interpersonal attraction. Interpersonal attraction has been defined as a multidimensional construct consisting of physical attraction, social attraction, and task attraction. Physical attraction, according to McCroskey and Richmond (1996), pertains to the degree of likelihood that an individual would develop a fondness or liking for another person based on their physical appearance. Physical attraction is not seen as an appropriate construct within the current study that examines the student-teacher relationship and was therefore not examined. McCroskey and Richmond (1996) define social attraction as the degree to which one individual desires to spend time with another individual on an informal level. Social attraction is based on how friendly and likable an individual is perceived to be. Task attraction pertains to how much one individual desires to work with another individual (McCroskey & Richmond, 1996). The following paragraphs report the findings from two different instructional communication studies that examined interpersonal attraction, perceived credibility, and homophily (similarity).

Hickson, Handley, and Thomson (1978) examined the relationship between students' perceptions of teacher credibility, interpersonal attraction, and homophily and their effects on perceived teacher effectiveness. The researchers administered the McCroskey Communication Scales of perceived source credibility (McCroskey, 1966), interpersonal attraction (McCroskey & McCain, 1974), and homophily (McCroskey, Richmond, & Daly, 1975) along with a teacher rating scale that examined the perceived effectiveness of the teacher to 138 high school students in order to determine the relationship between these variables. Hickman, Handley, and Thomson's research findings suggested that student perceived credibility, interpersonal attraction, and homophily were significant predictors of teachers' perceived classroom effectiveness.

These results indicate that students who perceive their teachers to be credible, attractive, and similar to themselves also perceive these teachers to be more capable and competent in the classroom.

Rojas-Gomez and Pearson (1990) examined students' perceptions of teacher credibility and homophily in relation to English speaking and English-as-a-second-language speaking instructors. Rojas-Gomez and Pearson defined homophily as a two component construct inclusive of shared background/demographic information, and shared attitude similarity. The researchers defined credibility according to McCroskey's (1966) two-part construct of competence and character. The researchers found that students' perceived English speaking teachers as higher in background and attitude similarity, and character than English-as-a-second-language teachers. However, the results did not indicate that one teacher was perceived as more credible than the other. Additional findings suggested that female teachers were perceived as having more background similarity, and credibility in relation to both competence and character, but were perceived to have less attitude similarity than male teachers.

The findings from these previous two studies are relevant to the current thesis in that they continue to promote the knowledge that teacher behaviors and messages clearly effect students' relational perceptions of teachers. Again, it is important that we uncover the transactional nature of the teacher-student relationship and expand the research to examine how students influence teachers' relational perceptions. By examining from a product-process paradigm (students influencing teachers), we will better understand how student humor may effect teachers' perceptions and ultimately effect the teachers' anticipated leniency toward student misbehaviors.

Rationale for Current Study

The rationale for this study was articulated in the argument that introduced this chapter. This argument stated that student humor functions as a relational variable in the instructional context and ultimately influences how teachers' perceive students and how they anticipate behaving toward them.

To construct this argument, literature was reviewed to support four claims.

Claim 1:   Student communication behaviors influence the perceptions teachers form of students (Comstock, 1999).

Claim 2:   Humor functions as a relational variable (Graham, Papa & Brooks, 1992).

Claim 3:   Humor is a personality variable that influences how we use and interpret humor (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991).

Claim 4:   Perceptions of credibility and interpersonal attraction are important relational variables in the instructional context (Baringer & McCroskey, 2000; Frymier & Thompson, 1992).

Knowing that student and perceived teacher humor orientations interact to yield different learning outcomes in students (Wanzer & Frymier, 1999), it was also believed that teacher and perceived student humor orientations may interact similarly. Wanzer and Frymier (1999) found that high HO students and high HO perceived teacher humor orientations yielded significantly more affective and cognitive learning than both low HO and high HO students with a low HO teacher. They explained this effect using the principle of similarity or homophily (McCroskey, Richmond, & Daly, 1975).

Homophily appeared to be playing a role here. High HO students clearly preferred

a teacher with a similar humor orientation. This finding is similar to that of

Wooten and McCroskey (1996) and Elliot (1979), which indicated that teacher-

student similarities led to positive classroom outcomes. (p. 58)

Based on Wanzer and Frymier's (1999) homophily explanation, the following

hypotheses were posited testing teachers' perceptions of credibility and interpersonal

attraction.

H1:   If a student is a high HO and a teacher is a high HO, then the teacher will

perceive the student's **character** dimension of credibility significantly

higher than if a student is a high HO and the teacher is a low HO.

H2:   If a student is a high HO and a teacher is a high HO, then the teacher will

perceive the student's **competence** dimension of credibility significantly

higher than if a student is a high HO and the teacher is a low HO.

H3:   If a student is a high HO and a teacher is a high HO, then the teacher will

perceive the student's **task attraction** significantly higher than if a student

is a high HO and the teacher is a low HO.

H4:   If a student is a high HO and a teacher is a high HO, then the teacher will

perceive the student's **social attraction** significantly higher than if a

student is a high HO and the teacher is a low HO.

In this study, teacher leniency was operationalized by how willing a teacher is to

overlook student misbehaviors. Prior research suggests that students misbehave both

actively and passively (Bellon, Doek, & Handler, 1979; Kearney, Plax, Sorenson, &

Smith, 1988). To determine if humor may have some of the same mediating effects as

nonverbal immediacy in terms of a teacher granting preferential treatment, the following

hypothesis was tested:

> H5:   If a student is a high HO and a teacher is a high HO, then the teacher will
>
> be more **lenient in overlooking** student misbehaviors than if a student is a
>
> high HO and the teacher is a low HO.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

This section will review the methodology used in this quasi-experimental study to test the previously stated hypotheses. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section reviews the subjects who participated in the study, and the design and administration of the questionnaire. The second section reviews the measurement and manipulation of the independent variables including teacher humor orientation and student humor orientation. The final section reviews the measurement of the dependent variables including perceptions of student credibility, perceptions of student interpersonal attraction, and teacher leniency.

Subjects and Questionnaire Design / Administration

Subjects. The subjects consisted of faculty members employed at Southwest Texas State University. Faculty members were identified using the 2000-2001 campus directory. This directory yielded a list of 916 faculty members. In order to be eligible to participate in the study, faculty members had to currently teach at least one course of 35 or fewer students. In this quasi-experimental design, it was thought that limiting the class size to 35 or fewer students would increase the amount of interpersonal interaction between teacher and student and would allow the teacher to more accurately assess students and their communication behaviors. A similar methodology was used by Baringer and McCroskey (2000).

Questionnaire design and administration. The questionnaire was a six-page document that took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The questionnaire included scales that measured teacher humor orientation, perceived student humor orientation, perceived student credibility, perceived student interpersonal attraction, and teacher leniency. Subjects were also asked to respond to questions related to their sex, student sex, and the teacher's professional rank at the university. The questionnaire was approved by the university's Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and by the Internal Review Board.

Two versions of the questionnaire were developed. Both versions remained identical except for a slight variation in the general instructions (see Appendix B). The first version asked the subject to identify a student s/he perceived to be "friendly, highly participative, and spirited or lively" in a class of 35 or fewer students that s/he was currently teaching. The teacher was asked to keep this student in mind while completing the questionnaire. To focus the teacher's attention on this identified student throughout the instrument, the instructor was asked to write the student's first name at the top right of each page of the questionnaire. The second version asked the teacher to identify a student s/he perceived to be the "typical" student in a class of 35 or fewer that s/he was currently teaching. Again, the teacher was asked to keep this student in mind while completing the questionnaire and was instructed to write the student's first name at the top right of each page of the questionnaire.

The two wording variations in the general instructions were done to insure that a relatively equal number of high and low humor oriented students were identified by teachers. It was thought that an induction asking a teacher to identify a "spirited" or

"lively" student might capture students who were perceived to be higher in humor orientation by their teachers. The humor orientation scale (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991) is relatively new, however, and its use has been limited to students' perceptions of instructors' humor orientation (Frymier & Wanzer, 1999; Wanzer & Frymier, 1999). Prior research suggests that the measure yields a mean score that runs slightly above the scale's actual midpoint of 57 when completed by students perceiving their teachers' humor orientation

In this study the instructor completed the measure of humor orientation based on his/her perceptions of an identified student. The instructor's perceptions may not be as accurate as student's completing the humor orientation scale on their instructor since students had to focus on only one instructor per class. Consequently, there may not be an equally distributed range of scores on humor orientation. This could effect the median score, thus creating a biasing effect when executing the median split procedure. For these reasons, the general instructions were modified slightly so that instructors would identify a student who was "friendly, highly participative, and spirited or lively" in the first version of the survey and would identify a student who was "typical" in the second version.

The two forms of the questionnaire were divided 50/50 and 458 copies of each version were mailed, using the university's interdepartmental mail, to the 916 faculty members. The questionnaire contained a cover letter indicating the criteria needed in order to participate in the study (see Appendix A). Again, instructors were required to currently teach at least one class of 35 or fewer students, participation was voluntary, and lack of participation did not prejudice their future with the university. Participants were

assured their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. Each questionnaire included a self-addressed return envelope. All subjects were encouraged to complete the questionnaire as soon as possible (i.e., 1-2 days).

Six days after the initial mailing, a follow-up email message was forwarded to all 916 identified faculty members reminding them to complete and return their questionnaire (see Appendix C). Of the 916 questionnaires that were mailed, 40 or 4.4% were unusable because of incomplete data or the teacher did not meet the initial criteria for participation. In terms of questionnaires that were usable, 152 or 17% were returned and analyzed. An exact response rate is not available since the number of faculty members who were not eligible to participate, because of eligibility criteria or were on leave or sabbatical, is unknown.

Measurement and Manipulation of Independent Variables

This 2 X 2 quasi-experimental study examined teacher perceptions of their own humor orientation and that of their students. The following paragraphs review how teacher and student humor orientations were measured and manipulated.

Measurement of teacher humor orientation. All subjects were instructed to complete the Humor Orientation (HO) Scale developed by Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991). This measure assess how often teachers used humor and how efficacious they perceived themselves to be when using humor. Teacher humor orientation was measured using a self-report version of the HO scale (see Appendix D). Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) found the instrument to have acceptable reliability and face validity. In Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (1995), the HO scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .92 when used as a self-report scale. A year

later, in Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (1996), the HO scale yielded a

Cronbach's alpha of .88 as a self-report scale.

The HO instrument consists of seventeen items measuring "frequency" and

"effectiveness" of humor used during social or class situations. An example of a

"frequency" item included "I regularly tell jokes and funny stories when I am with a

group." An example of an "effectiveness" item included "People usually laugh when I

tell a joke or story." Subjects were asked to respond to the 17 statements on a five-point,

Likert-type scale with 1=strongly agree and 5=strongly disagree. Of the 17 items, 7 items

were reversed scored. Respondents scoring high on the HO scale are viewed as better

able to produce a variety of humorous statements across a wide range of contexts, while

low HOs are less likely to produce humorous messages and feel uncompelled to be

humorous in any situation. The HO scale has a range from 17-85 and an actual mid-point

of 51. The HO scale yielded a mean of 61.2 in Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, Booth-

Butterfield (1995) when used as a self report. Descriptive data for all independent and

dependent variables including range, means, standard deviations, and alpha reliabilities is

presented in the Results section of this thesis.

Measurement of perceived student humor orientation. Subjects were also

instructed to complete an other-report version of the HO scale (see Appendix E). This

methodology replicates that used by Wanzer and Frymier (1999) where students

completed a self and other report of the humor orientation measure. The other-report

version of the HO scale consisted of the same seventeen items as indicated on the self-

report instrument and measures the "frequency" and "effectiveness" of humor used

during social or class situations. An example of a "frequency" item included "This

student regularly tells jokes and funny stories when in a group of people." An example of an "effectiveness" item included "Others usually laugh when this student tells a joke or story." When used as an other-report, Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, Booth-Butterfield (1996) found that the HO scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .92, and Wanzer and Frymier (1999) found the instrument yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .95.

Subjects completing the other-report HO scale were again required to respond to the 17 statements using the same five-point, Likert-type scale with 1=strongly agree and 5=strongly disagree. Again, 7 items of the 17 total statements were reversed scored. The other-report version of the HO scale has a range of 17 - 85. Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (1996) used the other-report version of the HO scale twice and reported mean scores of 63.2 and 64.5. Wanzer and Frymier (1999) reported that the other-report had a mean of 51.4.

Manipulation of independent variables. Using an ex-post facto statistical design, the data collected from the teacher humor orientation and perceived student humor orientation scales were blocked into high and low conditions. An extreme conditions approach was used to block the high and low humor orientation conditions rather than the median split method. One reason for using the extreme conditions method over the median split method was because of the distribution of scores for the teacher humor orientation scale. Although the scale has an actual midpoint of 51 suggesting that those higher than 51 are high HO and those below 51 are low HO, the teachers comprising this sample rated their humor orientations considerably lower than the scale's actual midpoint. This will be described in more detail in the Results chapter of this thesis.

Another reason for using the extreme conditions approach is offered by Dubin

(1978). According to Dubin, hypotheses must be tested by "stating critical or limiting

values for one of the units involved. . . Critical values are notable because something

more than the usual increment of change in value occurs at the critical points" (p. 168).

Dubin suggested that hypotheses should be tested by focusing on variables or units that

have a "notable" influence on the values of other variables or units. For these reasons, the

top and bottom thirds of the sample were used to test the five research hypotheses.

According to Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991), self-reported high HOs

were described as being better able to use a variety of humorous techniques across a

range of contexts. Self-reported low HOs were described as taking more time in the

planning and preparation of humorous messages and used humor infrequently.

Measurement of Dependent Variables

The following paragraphs will describe the dependent variables examined in this

study including teacher perceptions of student credibility (competence and character),

teacher perceptions of student interpersonal attraction (task and social attraction), and

teacher leniency toward common student misbehaviors.

Perceptions of student credibility. The two dimensions of perceived student

credibility included competence and character. Competence is a perception of an

individual having knowledge over a particular subject matter while character is a

perception of an individual being trustworthy or honest (McCroskey, 1966). These two

dimensions were treated as separate scales, which is common in instructional

communication research (Thweatt & McCroskey, 1998). McCroskey (1966) developed a

measure of source credibility and according to Rubin, Palmgreen, and Sypher (1994), the

competence dimension yields reliabilities ranging from .94 - .98. The character

dimension yields reliabilities ranging from .93 - .98.

The measure used in this analysis consisted of 12 pairs of bipolar adjectives laid

out on a seven-point semantic differential scale (see Appendix F). Six sets of bipolar

adjectives described perceived student character and included parings such as

honorable/dishonorable, ethical/unethical, honest/dishonest, moral/immoral,

phony/genuine, and trustworthy/untrustworthy. Three of the bipolar pairings were reverse

scored. The other six sets of bipolar adjectives described perceived student competence

and included pairings such as trained/untrained, informed/uninformed, expert/inexpert,

intelligent/unintelligent, bright/stupid, and competent/incompetent . Three of the bipolar

pairs were reverse scored.

Subjects were asked to indicate the adjective that best fits their feelings about the

identified student by circling the number closest to the adjective. Subjects were informed

that the closer the number to the adjective, the more certain they were of their evaluation

of the identified student. High scores indicated that a student was perceived as having

more credibility. Student perceived competence ranged from 18-42 and had an actual mid

point of 30. Student perceived character ranged from 18-42 and also had an actual mid

point of 30.

Perceptions of student interpersonal attraction. As with the measure of perceived

student credibility, perceived interpersonal attraction included two dimensions and was

treated as two separate scales. Social attraction can be defined as a desire to want to know

a particular individual by talking with him/her, or participating in joint activities

(McCroskey & McCain, 1974). Task attraction can be defined as a desire to work with

someone on a project or an assignment (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). Perceived student

task and social attraction were measured using an adapted version of the McCroskey and

McCain (1974) Measure of Interpersonal Attraction. According to Rubin, Palmgreen, and

Sypher (1994), the McCroskey and McCain instrument yields internal reliabilities of .84

for social attraction and .81 for task attraction. McCroskey, Richmond, and Daly (1975)

reported split-half reliabilities of .90 for social attraction and .87 for task attraction.

The social and task dimensions of interpersonal attraction consisted of eight

statements that required the subject to choose his/her level of agreement on a seven-point,

Likert-type scale with 1=strongly disagree and 7=stronlgy agree (see Appendix G). Four

statements addressed social attraction and included phrases such as "I think this student

could be a friend of mine outside of class." The other four statements addressed task

attraction and included phrases such as "I have confidence in this student's ability to

complete quality assignments/projects/activities/duties." Of the eight statements, three

were reverse scored under the social attraction dimension and two were reverse scored

under the task attraction dimension. High scores indicated that teachers perceived a

student as being more socially and task attractive than low scores. Perceived task

attraction ranged from 4-28 and had an actual mid point of 16. Perceived social attraction

ranged from 4-28 and had an actual mid point of 16.

Teacher leniency. Teacher leniency was measured by asking teachers to consider

their willingness to overlook certain student misbehaviors. A measure was developed

specifically for this study. The measurement was developed from teacher observations of

student misbehaviors and from prior research examining student misbehaviors. Previous

research has identified various types of misbehaviors including disruptively talking,

inattention to the lesson, absenteeism, untimely arrival to or departure from class, completing other homework, and other general disruptive behaviors (DeLucia, 1995; Plax & Kearney, 1999; Plax, Kearney, & Tucker, 1986; Richmond & Gorham, 1996).

To assess the content validity of the measure, a short survey was distributed to 14 faculty members and 20 Graduate Teaching Assistants in the Department of Speech Communication. They were asked to describe some of the student behaviors they had observed and considered to be misbehaviors in their classrooms. This survey yielded items that were added including "allowing his/her cell phone to ring," "completing other coursework during class" and "antagonizing other students during class."

The final version of the scale included fourteen student misbehaviors. They were listed under the prompt "How likely are you to overlook this student...?." Subjects were asked to respond using a five-point, Likert-type scale of 1=not likely and 5=very likely (see Appendix H). Sample misbehaviors included "leaving early or arriving late to class for no apparent reason," "coming to class unprepared," "using inappropriate language during class" and "challenging your authority as teacher." None of the statements were reversed scored. High scores indicated that the teacher was more lenient in overlooking certain student misbehaviors while low scores indicated less leniency in overlooking certain student misbehaviors. The leniency measure had a range of 14-70 with an actual mid point of 42. The leniency scale was found to have an internal consistency of .87.

All 14 items were subjected to a principle components factor analysis with varimax rotation to assess the underlying structure of the Teacher Leniency measure. The un-rotated factor matrix revealed all items having their heaviest loading on the first

factor. All but one item (#11) had a loading of .50 or greater on the first factor. Un-

rotated factor loadings are represented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Unrotated Factor Loadings of 14 Items Comprising the Teacher Leniency Measure

Item	Factor Loading
1	.54
2	.61
3	.60
4	.70
5	.61
6	.70
7	.58
8	.52
9	.71
10	.63
11	.45
12	.50
13	.60
14	.66

When the 14 items were rotated, a four-factor solution emerged. Criteria for factor

extraction were (a) eigenvalue $\geq$ 1.00, (b) examination of scree plot for the number of

factors, (c) loadings at $\geq$ .50 with at least two items loading at $\geq$ .60, (d) each factor

accounting for at least 5% of the variance. All but two of the items met these criteria (#3,

#11). These two items were retained because on their face, both clearly represented

student misbehaviors (#3 Turning in in-complete homework for no apparent reason; #11

Cheating on projects/assignments/tests) and neither item detracted from the internal

consistency of the measure. Rotated factor loadings and variance accounted for by factor

are represented in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

Varimax Rotated Factor Loadings of 14 Items Comprising the Teacher Leniency
Measure

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
1	.71			
2	.79			
3	.43			
8	.52			
10	.58			
11		.46		
12		.50		
13		.88		
14		.68		
4			.68	
5			.70	
6			.81	
7				.67
9				.67
Variance	40%	12%	9%	7%

Although four sub-factors emerged from the rotated factor pattern, the instrument appears to be a unidimensional measure for the following psychometric and theoretical reasons. First, the 14 items have an internal consistency of .87 using the Cronbach's alpha. This coefficient remains rather high considering the small number of items in the measure. Second, each of the item's squared multiple correlation with the other 13 items remains at .40 or higher. Third, all 14 items had their heaviest loading on the first factor with all coefficients being at .50 or greater, with the exception of one item (#11).

Theoretically, the Teacher Leniency measure was designed to include both active and passive misbehaviors (Kearney & Plax, 1992). From the analyses, it appears that the first factor, which accounted for 40% of the measure's variance included the passive

student misbehaviors including coming to class unprepared (10), missing class (1), leaving class early (2), turning in in-complete homework (3), and being unresponsive (8).

Factors 2, 3, and 4 all contain items that clearly reflect active student misbehaviors: cheating (Factor 2, Item 11), reading newspaper during class (Factor 3, Item 6), and interrupting class by talking to friend (Factor 4, Item 9). Together the three sub-factors accounted for 28% of the variance in the Teacher Leniency measure. If the purpose of this thesis were to develop a measure of Teacher Leniency, these three factors would be scrutinized more closely to determine how subjects interpreted the nine items comprising active student misbehaviors. Since the fifth research hypothesis is only interested in examining the interaction of teacher and perceived student humor orientations with teachers' leniency in overlooking student misbehaviors, collapsing the four sub-factors into one and analyzing the 14-items as a unidimensional measure seems justified both from theoretical and psychometric perspectives.

Analysis of Data

All questionnaire data were entered and processed using the SPSS. The data were verified by running descriptive statistics to ensure that all range scores for each instrument were appropriate. To test the six hypotheses in this 2 X 2 quasi-experimental design, individual analyses of variance were computed. Follow-up tests of significant difference were computed to examine mean differences interaction and main effects.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter reviews the results from this investigation of humor in the classroom

and its effects on teachers and their teaching. The chapter begins with a descriptive

statistical summary of sample demographics followed by a descriptive statistical

summary of the various instruments used in the study. The chapter concludes with results

from the testing of the five hypotheses.

Summary of Sample Demographics

As reported in the Method chapter of this thesis, the subjects in this quasi-

experimental design consisted of faculty members employed at Southwest Texas State

University during the Spring semester of 2001. In order to be eligible to participate in the

study, all respondents were required to currently teach at least one class of 35 or fewer

students. Nine hundred and sixteen questionnaires were distributed through intercampus

mail and a total of 192 questionnaires (21%) were returned. An accurate response rate of

eligible faculty could not be calculated since it was not possible to determine how many

faculty had classes of 35 students or less. Forty subjects were dropped from the

experiment due to incomplete questionnaires yielding a total of 152 subjects that were

included in the actual analysis.

The demographic information representing the sample is reflected in Table 4.1.

The data indicate that 70 male teachers and 82 female teachers responded to the

questionnaire and reported on their perceptions of 61 male students, 90 female students,

and one student whose sex was unreported. Of the 152 subjects, 22 were professors, 31 were associate professors, 36 were assistant professors, 50 were lecturers / instructors, and 13 were graduate teaching assistants.

Table 4.1

Summary of Demographics

	Frequency	Percentage
Teacher Sex		
Male	70	46.1
Female	82	53.9
Student Sex		
Male	61	40.1
Female	90	59.2
Unknown	1	.7
Teacher Rank		
Professor	22	14.5
Associate Professor	31	20.4
Assistant Professor	36	23.7
Instructor / Lecturer	50	32.8
Graduate Teaching Assistant	13	8.6
Other	0	0

Descriptive Statistics for Instruments

This section reviews the descriptive statistics for the independent variables including teacher humor orientation and perceived student humor orientation. This section will also review the dependent variables including perceived student credibility, perceived student interpersonal attraction, and teacher leniency.

This study tested two independent variables (i.e., teacher humor orientation and perceived student humor orientation) using Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield's (1991) Humor Orientation Scale.

Teacher humor orientation. In this study, an ex-post facto statistical design was used to create high and low teacher humor orientation conditions. The humor orientation scale has a range from 17-85 with an actual mid point of 51. In this study, the humor orientation measure had a range of 17-77 and yielded a median score of 41 when used as a self-report. This was considerably below the measure's actual mid point. Because of this, an extreme conditions approach was used to block the teacher sample into high and low HO conditions. Only the top and bottom thirds of the distribution of teacher humor orientation scores were analyzed. The bottom third (low HO) was divided at a summed score of 36. The top third (high HO) was divided at a summed score of 46. Thirty-four percent of the teachers considered themselves low HO (N = 51), while another 34% of the teachers considered themselves high HO (N = 51). The teacher humor orientation measure was found to be internally consistent with a Cronbach's alpha of .91.

Perceived student humor orientation. Using the same measure but as an other-report, the perceived student humor orientation measure had a range from 39-82 and yielded a median score of 55. As with the teacher humor orientation sample, an extreme conditions approach was used to block the student sample into high and low HO conditions. Only the top and bottom thirds of the distribution of perceived student humor orientation scores were analyzed. The bottom third (low HO) was divided at a summed score of 50. The top third (high HO) was divided at a summed score of 60. Twenty-four percent of the students were perceived as low HOs (N=36), while another 28% of the students were perceived as high HOs (N=43). The perceived student humor orientation measure was found to be internally consistent with a Cronbach's alpha of .83.

Table 4.2 reflects the number of teachers and students who fell into the respective cells using the extreme conditions approach to blocking.

Table 4.2

Extreme Conditions for Teacher and Student Humor Orientation

		High HO Student	Low HO Student	Totals
		(50-82)	(39-50)	
High HO Teacher	(46-77)	N=9	N=16	N=25
Low HO Teacher	(17-36)	N=18	N=13	N=31
Totals		N=27	N=29	N=56

This study tested the effects of teacher humor orientation and perceived student humor orientation on five dependent variables: credibility (competence, character), interpersonal attraction (social, task), and teacher leniency.

Perceived credibility. McCroskey's (1966) measure of perceived credibility contains two dimensions including competence and character. In this study, the scores on the competence dimension ranged from 18-42. The competence dimension yielded a mean of 29.96, standard deviation of 6.55, and was internally consistent with a Cronbach's alpha of .76. The scores on the character dimension ranged from 18-42. The character dimension yielded a mean of 33.49, standard deviation of 7.37, and was internally consistent with a Cronbach's alpha of .77.

Perceived interpersonal attraction. McCroskey and McCain's (1974) measure of interpersonal attraction contains three sub-scales, however only social and task were examined in this study. Scores on the social attraction dimension ranged from 4-28. The social attraction dimension yielded a mean of 19.23, standard deviation of 6.28, and was internally consistent with a Cronbach's alpha of .76.

Scores on the task attraction dimension ranged from 4-28. The task attraction dimension yielded a mean of 22.71, standard deviation of 5.36, and was lacking in internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of only .64.

Teacher leniency. The teacher leniency measure was developed specifically for this study from teacher observations of student misbehaviors and from prior research examining student misbehaviors. Scores on the teacher leniency scale ranged from 14-57. The teacher leniency measure yielded a mean of 23.05, standard deviation of 8.40, and was internally consistent with a Cronbach's alpha of .87.

Testing of Hypotheses

Five hypotheses were tested in this study. All hypotheses were tested using the analysis of variance statistic. Follow-up univariate tests of significant difference were computed to determine mean differences between the four conditions of the experiment.

The first hypothesis predicted that if a student is a high HO and a teacher is a high HO, then the teacher will perceive the student's character dimension of credibility significantly higher than if a student is a high HO and the teacher is a low HO. This hypothesis was not supported. Although the interaction effect was significant [F (1,55) = 4.09, $p < .05$], the high HO student and high HO teacher cell mean score (M = 34.00, SD = 6.67) was not significantly higher [t (25) = 1.18, $p > .05$] than the high HO student and low HO teacher cell mean score (M = 36.89, SD = 5.64) for perceived character.

The second hypothesis predicted that if a student is a high HO and a teacher is a high HO, then the teacher will perceive the student's competence dimension of credibility significantly higher than if a student is a high HO and a teacher is a low HO. This hypothesis was not supported. Although the interaction effect was significant [F (1,55) =

5.99, p < .05], the high HO student and high HO teacher cell mean score (M = 30.56, SD = 5.39) was not significantly higher [t (25) = .74, p > .05] than the high HO student and low HO teacher cell mean score (M = 32.39, SD = 6.34) for perceived competence.

The third hypothesis predicted that if a student is a high HO and a teacher is a high HO, then the teacher will perceive the student's task attraction significantly higher than if a student is a high HO and a teacher is a low HO. This hypothesis was not supported. The interaction effect was not significant F (1,55) = 2.83, p > .05.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that if a student is a high HO and a teacher is a high HO, then the teacher will perceive the student's social attraction significantly higher than if a student is a high HO and a teacher is a low HO. This hypothesis was not supported. The interaction effect was not significant F (1,55) = .38, p > .05.

The fifth and final hypothesis predicted that if a student is a high HO and a teacher is a high HO, then the teacher will be more lenient in overlooking student misbehaviors than if a student is a high HO and a teacher is a low HO. This hypothesis was not supported. The interaction effect was not significant F (1,55) = .004, p > .05.

This chapter has offered a summary of the current study's demographics and a descriptive statistical summary of all the instruments used. A review of the results from the testing of hypotheses was also offered. The next chapter will discuss possible theoretical and methodological explanations for both the hypothesized results and the un-hypothesized results.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the hypothesized and un-hypothesized results of this thesis and offers possible theoretical and methodological explanations for these results. Limitations of the current study are addressed, along with suggested directions for future research. A summary of the entire study is provided at the end of the chapter.

Hypothesized Results

This thesis argued that teachers would perceive student humor positively and that this would enhance relational perceptions of credibility and interpersonal attraction in the classroom context. It was hypothesized that these enhanced relational perceptions would ultimately influence anticipated teacher leniency in terms of overlooking student misbehaviors. The following five hypotheses were predicted:

H1: If a student is a high HO and a teacher is a high HO, then the teacher will perceive the student's **character** dimension of credibility significantly higher than if a student is a high HO and the teacher is a low HO.

H2: If a student is a high HO and a teacher is a high HO, then the teacher will perceive the student's **competence** dimension of credibility significantly higher than if a student is a high HO and the teacher is a low HO.

H3: If a student is a high HO and a teacher is a high HO, then the teacher will perceive the student's **task attraction** significantly higher than if a student is a high HO and the teacher is a low HO.

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H4: If a student is a high HO and a teacher is a high HO, then the teacher will perceive the student's **social attraction** significantly higher than if a student is a high HO and the teacher is a low HO.

H5: If a student is a high HO and a teacher is a high HO, then the teacher will be more **lenient in overlooking** student misbehaviors than if a student is a high HO and the teacher is a low HO.

The rationale for the five hypotheses was based on the homophily research literature (McCroskey, Richmond, & Daly, 1975) and on Wanzer and Frymier (1999) where high HO students and high HO perceived teacher humor orientations interacted to yield significantly more affective and cognitive learning. All of the research hypotheses were rejected in favor of the null hypotheses.

Theoretical explanations for hypothesized results. As a way to provide a theoretical explanation for the five disconfirmed hypotheses, a re-examination of the research literature was conducted focusing on the effects of humor in the instructional context. Four possible explanations are presented: inconsistent research results examining the effects of humor, individual characteristics influencing humor use and interpretation, variations in how humor functions, and varying perceptions of appropriate teacher/student roles in the classroom context.

The first theoretical explanation for the hypothesized results suggests that the unknown and inconsistent effects of humor in the classroom, and the reversed process-product paradigm nature of this thesis contributed to why the null hypotheses were retained. Some studies have found humor to produce positive effects such as higher student learning (Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Wanzer & Frymier, 1999; Ziv, 1988),

increased student motivation (Frymier & Wanzer, 1999), and reduced classroom stress

(Comeaux, 1995). Other studies have found that humor in the classroom creates a more

defensive communication climate (Darling & Civikly, 1987). Still, other studies found

that the use of teacher humor had little effect on students' perceptions of their teachers'

competence (Bryant, Comisky, Crane, & Zillmann 1980).

One reason why all five null hypotheses were retained may be because

communication researchers are still unsure whether humor has a positive, negative, or

curvilinear relationship in the classroom context. The results from the current study differ

from findings of past research examining the interactions of teacher and student humor

orientations. Wanzer and Frymier (1999) found that the interaction between high HO

teachers and students yielded the most learning. In the current study it was hypothesized

that this interaction effect may yield similar outcomes in terms of teachers' perceptions of

student credibility, interpersonal attraction, and leniency in overlooking student

misbehaviors. This was clearly not the case with the five hypotheses tested in this thesis.

In this study, the homophily effect did not appear. In fact, dis-similarity yielded enhanced

perceptions of credibility. Low HO teachers perceived high HO students as having

significantly more character (M = 36.89, SD = 5.69) and competence (M = 32.39, SD =

6.34) than low HO students' character (M = 28.92, SD = 6.61) and competence (M =

24.08, SD = 4.73). Complex F ratios are reported in the un-hypothesized results section

later in this chapter. Cell means, standard deviations, N size, and significant differences

are reported in Table 5.1. Additionally, high HO teachers perceived low HO students as

having significantly more character (M = 33.50, SD = 7.66) and competence (M = 30.38,

SD = 6.77) than low HO teachers' perceptions of low HO students' character (M = 28.92,

SD = 6.61) and competence (M = 24.08, SD = 4.73). The t value for character was t

(1,55) = 4.10, p < .05 and for competence was t (1,55) = 6.00, p < .05.

The effects for perceived credibility may be explained partially by the

interpersonal communication research literature examining types of relationships

including symmetrical and complementary (Sluzki & Beavin, 1977). Symmetrical

relationships are those in which both parties exhibit the same types of behaviors. For

example, both students and teacher engage in humorous dialogue. Complementary

relationships are those in which both parties exhibit different or companion types of

behaviors. For example, a student may engage in humorous scripts where as a teacher's

scripts remain more traditional and serious. The complementary type of interpersonal

relationship may help explain why low HO teachers perceived high HO students as

having significantly more credibility, than low HO students.

It could be that in the classroom context, a symmetrical relationship is not valued

because of the teacher/student roles. Humorous teachers may view humorous students as

competitive of classroom time or attention. A high HO teacher may view a student with a

symmetrical communication style as disruptive to the teaching style of the teacher. It

appears that from a teacher's perspective, student humor may be appreciated more when

the relationship is more complimentary. Low HO teachers may be more appreciative of

high HO students because the two communication styles tend to balance each other,

causing a more positive classroom climate.

This thesis also viewed the use of humor from a different perspective. Previous

research has examined the effects of humor from a student's perspective. Researchers

examined how teachers used humor in the instructional context and how humor affected

students and their learning. In contrast, this thesis examined the effects of student humor on teachers and their teaching. This reversed perspective adds to the inconsistent results of humor effectiveness simply because this perspective has not been examined before in the instructional communication research literature. It may be safe to assume that before we examine further how student humor affects teachers, a more comprehensive theory of instructional humor may be necessary. It appears that humor remains a precarious variable in the instructional context. Research suggests that student perceived humor has both positive and negative effects in the classroom. Additionally, it appears that in this first study to examine humor from the teacher's perspective, humor continues to stimulate more questions than answers.

The second theoretical explanation for the hypothesized results suggests that gender, age, years teaching, and level at which a teacher is teaching influence humor use and interpretation within the classroom context. Variations in the research results suggest that there may be individual differences in how humor is used and interpreted. Two such influences include gender (Bryant, Crane, Comisky, & Zillmann, 1980: Futch & Edwards, 1999), and age (Weaver, Zillmann, & Bryant, 1988). Neither gender nor age was examined in this thesis, although past research has examined both variables.

Bryant, Comisky, Crane and Zillmann (1980) found that student evaluations of teachers have been positively influenced by the use of humor, but only if the teacher was male. For example, male teachers employing general or unspecified forms of humor were perceived by their students to be more appealing and as having a superior delivery style than female teachers who employed the same general or unspecified forms of humor. The researchers explained this by arguing that sexual stereotyping discourages humorous

attempts by female teachers. When female teachers attempted humor, the attempt was frowned upon and viewed negatively by students.

Futch and Edwards (1999) examined the relationship between sense of humor and interpretation of ambiguous messages. The researchers found that females interpreted ambiguous messages in a more humorous way than males, who interpreted ambiguous messages more defensively.

Linking these findings back to the five hypotheses examined in this study, perhaps teachers' perceptions of students were influenced by the gender of both teacher and student. In other words, if students perceived female teachers to be less effective when using humor (Bryant, Comisky, Crane, & Zillmann, 1980), then perhaps teachers in this study viewed female students' use of humor as disruptive or out of line while interpreting male students' humor as task oriented or acceptable. Many possible interactions are probable, and gender may have influenced the interaction between teacher and perceived student HOs and the various dependent variables.

Age has also been an influential factor in determining whether humor has positive or negative effects. Weaver, Zillmann, and Bryant (1988) found that humor was used more often and understood better by adults than children. The researchers discovered that messages containing no humor were the most understood by elementary school children while messages containing irony, misleading information, and exaggeration were the least understood. Weaver et al., (1988) also discovered that a child's ability to decipher misleading messages did not significantly change between the child's fourth and eighth grade years.

In addition to age, level of teaching experience and the level at which a teacher teaches (high school vs. college) could have also had an effect on the hypotheses tested in this thesis. Downs, Javidi, and Nussbaum (1988) examined the relationship between teaching experience and the use of humor. The researchers found that award-winning teachers with more than ten years of teaching experience used humor an average of seven times during a single class meeting, while teachers with at least two years of teaching experience used humor an average of thirteen times during a single class meeting. Some teacher subjects in this thesis might have possessed varying degrees of acceptance for how much humor was appropriate in their classroom based on the number of years of teaching experience.

Neuliep (1991) found contrasting results when he compared high school and college instructors' use of humor. Neuliep found that although there was not a significant correlation between the number of years teaching and the amount of humorous attempts during a class meeting, high school teachers did employ humor less often than college teachers. The researcher explained this difference by suggesting that high school teachers may be more sensitive to whether or not their younger audience would misinterpret a humorous attempt and thus use humor less often.

Because the current study did not account for age of teacher or student, or experience level of teacher, there is no way of knowing if the teacher, due to a large age-gap, misinterpreted some forms of student humor or if the teacher, due to the age of the students, viewed humor as more disruptive than productive. In other words, an older high HO teacher may have viewed the humorous attempts of an eighteen year-old high HO student as awkward or unrelated to the topic at hand and hence, disruptive to the

classroom. The same older high HO teacher may have viewed the humorous attempts of a low HO student as methodical and over-rehearsed, hence the joke or story may have been lost on the teacher. In either case, the older high HO teacher may not have enjoyed the humor of the young high HO student. This may help explain why high HO teachers did not perceive high HO students as having significantly more credibility than when high HO students were perceived by low HO teachers.

The third theoretical explanation for the hypothesized results suggests that humor can be used to persuade, include, exclude, or show affection for others. These different functions of humor may impact the effectiveness of humor in the classroom. Meyer (2000) found that humor functioned as a way to: (1) identify, or create commonality between a speaker and an audience, (2) clarify information through anecdotes and memorable phrases, (3) enforce common social norms while honoring the norm breaker, and (4) differentiate or to develop alliances between individuals or groups. Meyer argued that these four functions of humor lie on a continuum that includes unification on one end and divisiveness on the other. According to Meyer, humor ultimately serves a dual function as both a unifier of similarities and a divider of differences.

Additionally, Graham, Papa, and Brooks (1992) asserted that humor has been used positively as an attempt to include others by identifying perceived similarities, or expressing affection toward others. Graham et al., (1992) also suggested that humor has been used negatively as an attempt to control others by demeaning them in an attempt to entertain others.

The various reasons for using humor explained previously could certainly affect the outcome of an interpersonal relationship and may possibly explain why all five

hypotheses predicted in the current study went unsupported. This thesis never identified what function of humor a student may have been engaged in when the teacher was asked to perceive that student's credibility and interpersonal attraction. Not knowing the reason why a student is using humor makes it impossible to understand what if any effect the function or purpose of a student's humor had on the dependent variables of perceived credibility, interpersonal attraction, and teacher leniency in overlooking student misbehaviors. Because there is no way of knowing where students' humorous attempts fell on Meyer's (2000) humor continuum (i.e. to unify or to divide) there is no way of determining how the reason or function of humor may have affected the interaction between students and teachers.

The fourth and final theoretical explanation for the hypothesized results focuses on the implications of role theory on the student-teacher relationship. Role theory suggests that the role or behavior pattern that an individual adopts is developed through the interactions with other individuals in an organization (Graen, 1976). Placed into the instructional context, teachers and students may exhibit specific behaviors based on their socially expected roles as leader (teacher) and follower (student). Teachers are expected to lecture, make class topics interesting to students, remain knowledgeable, answer questions, and help students apply new information to everyday knowledge. Students are expected to take notes, complete homework assignments, ask questions, remain attentive in class, and remain mindful and respectful of the teacher. Interpreted and applied in its strictest sense, role theory promotes a more linear relationship between superior and subordinates and limits the possibilities of any other form of relational interaction such as mentor/mentee or advisor/advisee.

In the context of the current study, perhaps some high HO teachers relied too heavily on role theory within their classrooms and viewed high HO students' humorous attempts as a challenge to the teacher's authority or a sign of disrespect to the teacher or class. This may help explain why high HO teachers did not perceive high HO students as being the most credible or interpersonally attractive. Low HO students may fit the student role better and are therefore perceived as more credible, even though teachers perceive high HO students as being more socially attractive than low HO students.

The previous section has examined the inconsistencies of past research examining humor, the individual differences that influence humor use and interpretation, the various functions of humor, and the implications of role theory on the student-teacher relationship. These theoretical explanations only partially explain why the research hypotheses in the current study were rejected in favor of the null hypotheses. The next section of this chapter examines possible methodological explanations.

Methodological explanations for hypothesized results. In addition to the theoretical explanations, there are three methodological explanations that may help explain why the null hypotheses were retained. These explanations include possible misinterpretations of scale items, relational stereotypes of the student-teacher relationship, and the internal consistency of the task attractiveness instrument.

First, when the questionnaires were returned, many of them contained qualitative comments written in the margins. One subject wrote "I teach a math class and our time is very precious, hence, jokes are not normally told during class." Another subject wrote "Jokes and stories are two different things." And yet another subject wrote, "Learning is serious business! Joke and story-telling is not a permissible part of class." These quotes

suggest that some subjects misinterpreted the items, thus compromising the HO scale and creating different conceptual definitions of humor. These varying interpretations could have biased how teachers answered scale items on how they perceived their own as well as student humor orientation.

Perhaps the above mentioned faculty members perceived student jokes and stories as disruptive in the classroom or as competition. For example, a high HO teacher may have viewed a high HO student as competing for students' attention by attempting to match the humor style of the teacher. Future researchers examining instructional humor may want to develop a set of more detailed instructions for the questionnaire explaining how humor is conceptualized in the classroom context. For example, Ziv (1988) conceptualized content specific humor by using humorous cartoons to help explain means and standard deviations in a statistics class.

Wanzer and Frymier (1999) found that there were appropriate and inappropriate forms of teacher humor from a student's perspective. The conceptual definition of appropriate humor consisted of related and unrelated topical humor, impersonations, and nonverbal behaviors. The conceptual definition of inappropriate teacher humor consisted of stereotypical humor, sexual humor, sick humor, and jokes that made light of serious issues. In regards to the current study's conceptualization of humor, perhaps only certain types of humor are considered appropriate by high HO teachers. In an attempt to reduce varying interpretations of what form of humor was being addressed in the current study, a clearly stated conceptual definition of a particular form of humor could have been added to the general instructions. An example would be requesting the teacher to look for student humor that was appropriate to the audience (i.e., inoffensive) and topic related.

Recently, Wrench and Richmond (2000) questioned the construct validity of Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield's (1991) HO scale. Wrench and Richmond argued that the measure does not assess "humor," but assesses one's ability to tell jokes and stories. The measure proposed by Wrench and Richmond supposedly remains more global and assesses one's ability to be "humorous" rather than one's ability to tell only jokes and stories. Additionally, it could be argued that the HO scale lacks content validity because it examines only verbal attributes of humor and ignores important nonverbal attributes such as facial expressions, vocalics, kinesics, and chronemics.

Put into the perspective of this thesis, the limited scope of the HO measure may have limited how teachers in the current study perceived student humor. Some teachers may have an appreciation for more subtle forms of humor such as sarcasm and irony, which are mostly conveyed through vocalics and chronemics. These more sophisticated and subtle forms of humor may be more appropriate to teachers than overt humor such as a student telling a one-line joke or relaying a humorous anecdote.

Second, stereotypic relational characteristics between teachers and students may have also played a role in why the null hypotheses were retained. This relates back to how role theory may predict teacher-student relational outcomes. This was mentioned in the theoretical explanations section of this chapter. All subjects were asked to rate an "identified" student on his/her level of perceived social attraction for the student. Social attraction is the level of interest one individual has in getting to know another individual outside of the working environment. An example item from the social attraction scale is "I think this student could be a friend of mine outside of class." A number of faculty members completed and returned their questionnaires with hand-written comments in the

margins saying things such as: "Any interpersonal relationship between teacher and student outside the classroom is wrong," or "I have no basis to answer the questions here, I do not know this student socially." Some faculty members considered socializing with students outside of the classroom context to be inappropriate. These qualitative comments suggest that some instructors may have a narrow view of the teacher-student relationship and limited it strictly to the classroom. This view may not be the instructors preference, however, in an environment of efficiency where classroom size is increased, assignments are streamlined, and students are often "pushed through" the system, some teachers may feel forced to take a less involved approach with their students.

This perspective may also be reflective of a "hands off" approach to teaching that could be related to role theory. As mentioned previously, role theory suggests that teachers and students follow specific roles within the classroom (Graen, 1976). These roles are based on social norms and rules and limit the teacher-student relationship to the more traditional one-way relationship of a teacher teaching and a student learning. The relationship is rigid and leaves little, if any, room for a stronger interpersonal relationship. Some teachers in the current study may have felt it inappropriate or uncomfortable to report their personal perceptions of how interpersonally attractive a particular student appeared to be to them.

Another factor influencing how teachers perceived their relationships with students may be the pressures college-level teachers feel to serve on numerous committees and publish their research in order to make tenure and retain their employment. In a professor's effort to publish and create new knowledge, students seeking advice or assistance outside of the classroom often conflict with what the

professor may perceive as rewarded behavior. Professors consumed by the need to publish or serve the academic community may believe that once students are "dealt with," the "real" work of a college professor can begin. Teachers today may be less interested in getting to know students on a face-to-face interpersonal level and rely more on assisted technology such as email or "Blackboard" to communicate with students in short, concise, one-message-fits-all communication. Although technology makes it more convenient to interact with students, it also diminishes the relational dimension of teacher-student communication. It is possible that faculty subjects who participated in this study may have taken a "hands off" approach to teaching. This limited role may have restricted the teacher-student interaction to in-class teaching, ignoring social roles that many institutions would like teachers to cultivate.

The third and final explanation focuses on the internal consistency of the task attractiveness measure. This measure's inadequate level of internal consistency may explain partially why the third hypothesis was not supported. Although in the past the task attraction scale has had an acceptable reliability of .81 (Rubin, Palmgreen, & Sypher, 1994), the Cronbach's alpha in the current study was .64. There does not seem to be an explanation for why the reliability of the scale was lower in this study than in previous studies, however a lower reliability increases the likelihood of making a Type II error (i.e., accepting the null hypothesis when it should have been rejected).

The previous section has examined possible misinterpretations of the scales, relational stereotypes, and the unreliability of the task attraction scale. These methodological explanations coupled with the prior theoretical explanations provide

some support for why the null hypotheses in the study were retained. The next section of the chapter discusses the un-hypothesized results.

Un-Hypothesized Results

This section of the chapter reviews the un-hypothesized results for all five dependent variables including perceived student credibility (character and competence), perceived student interpersonal attraction (task and social), and teacher leniency. This section also discusses how these results may affect the teacher-student relationship.

Perceived student credibility. The analysis of variance yielded a significant interaction effect between teacher humor orientation and perceived student humor orientation in terms of the character dimension of credibility, $F (1,55) = 4.09, p < .05$. The interaction between teacher humor orientation and perceived student humor orientation accounted for 7% (eta^2) of the variance in perceived student character. Follow-up univariate tests of significant difference (t-tests) indicated that low HO teachers who perceived their students as high HO reported a level of character that was significantly higher (M = 36.89) than low HO teachers who perceived their students as low HO (M = 28.92). Additionally, high HO teachers perceived low HO students (M = 33.50) as having significantly more character than low HO teachers' perceptions of low HO students (M = 28.92). Cell means, standard deviations, N size, and significant mean differences are reported in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1

Teacher and Student Humor Orientations and Perceived Student Character

	High HO Student	Low HO Student
High HO Teacher	M = 34.00[c] (6.67)	M = 33.50[b] (7.66)
	N = 9	N = 16
Low HO Teacher	M = 36.89[a] (5.69)	M = 28.92[abc] (6.61)
	N = 18	N = 13

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations. Means with the same superscripts are significantly different at the p < .05 level using tests of significant difference.

Perceived student competence. The analysis of variance yielded a significant

interaction effect between teacher humor orientation and perceived student humor

orientation in terms of the competence dimension of credibility, $F_{(1,55)} = 5.99$, $p < .05$.

The interaction between teacher humor orientation and perceived student humor

orientation accounted for 10% (eta^2) of the variance in perceived student competence.

Follow-up univariate tests of significant difference (t-tests) indicate that low HO teachers

who perceived their students as high HO reported a level of competence that was

significantly higher (M = 32.39) than low HO teachers who perceived their students as

low HO (M = 24.08). Additionally, high HO teachers perceived low HO students (M =

30.38) as having significantly more competence than low HO teachers' perceptions of

low HO students (M = 24.08). Cell means, standard deviations, N size, and significant

mean differences are reported in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

Teacher and Student Humor Orientations and Perceived Student Competence

	High HO Student	Low HO Student
High HO Teacher	M = 30.56[c] (5.39)	M = 30.38[b] (6.77)
	N = 9	N = 16
Low HO Teacher	M = 32.39[a] (6.34)	M = 24.08[abc] (4.73)
	N = 18	N = 13

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations. Means with the same superscript are significantly different at the p < .05 level using tests of significant difference.

The un-hypothesized results for hypotheses One and Two suggest that low HO teachers perceive high HO students favorably. They perceive them to be more competent and trustworthy, two perceptions that have been shown to be important for relational development (McCroskey, 1966). Overall, teachers, especially low HO teachers, perceive high HO students to be more believable. It also appears that high HO teachers perceive students' humorous attempts similarly regardless of the humor orientation of the student. Perhaps high HO teachers are better able to recognize, interpret, and appreciate humorous attempts from students regardless of their humor orientations.

Perceived social attraction. The analysis of variance did not yield a significant interaction effect for the dependent variable of perceived social attraction, however there was a significant main effect for the perceived student humor orientation independent variable, $F_{(1,55)} = 8.22$, $p < .01$. This main effect accounted for 14% (eta^2) of the variance in the perceived social attractiveness of students. High HO students were perceived by both high and low HO teachers as being significantly more socially attractive (M = 22.23, SD = 5.14) than low HO students (M = 17.44, SD 5.93). This

finding suggests that for the teachers who participated as subjects in this quasi-experimental study, student HO enhanced social attraction regardless of teacher HO.

These results are supported in previous research conducted by Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (1996). Wanzer et al., (1996) examined the correlation between other-reported HO and social attractiveness and found a positive correlation between HO and social attraction. In other words, as perceptions of other's HO increased, so do perceptions of social attraction. Overall, it seems that regardless of a teacher's HO, high HO students are perceived as more socially attractive than low HO students.

Task attraction. The analysis of variance found no significant interaction or main effects for this dependent variable. These results indicate that teacher and student levels of humor orientation have little, if any, effect on perceived student task attraction. This may be the result of this measure having a lower than usual reliability and/or that humor is more of a social rather than task variable.

Teacher leniency. One of the outcomes of a constructive teacher-student relationship may be a teacher's leniency in overlooking a student's misbehavior. The analysis of variance did not yield a significant interaction effect with teacher leniency, however there was a significant main effect for teacher humor orientation, $F (1,55) =$ 4.75, $p < .05$. This main effect accounted for 8% (eta^2) of the variance in teacher leniency. High HO teachers anticipated themselves being significantly more lenient in overlooking both high and low HO students' misbehaviors (M = 25.41, SD = 10.28) than low HO teachers (M = 21.12, SD = 6.95). These results suggest that high HO teachers are significantly more lenient in overlooking student misbehaviors than low HO teachers regardless of perceived student humor orientation.

The results from the fifth hypothesis can be explained by re-examining the characteristics of the high HO communication trait and some of the general functions of humor. Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) found that high HO individuals were more likely to use different types of humor in a variety of situations. Meyer (2000) found that one function of humor was to enforce social and group norms in a light hearted manner so as to avoid embarrassment of the norm breaker. Based on prior research findings and the results of the current study, high HO teachers may use humor more often than low HO teachers as a way to enforce classroom norms to avoid embarrassing the student who violated the norm. In other words, it may be possible for high HO teachers to use humor as a way to excuse certain student misbehaviors and by doing this, the teacher is actually enforcing classroom rules while allowing the student to save face. This explanation suggests that teacher leniency may be influenced more by the teacher's HO and less by the student's perceived HO.

Summary of Un-Hypothesized Results

The following list of knowledge claims summarize the un-hypothesized results:

1) Low HO teachers perceive high HO students as having significantly more character than low HO students (interaction effect).

2) Low HO teachers perceive high HO students as significantly more competent than low HO students (interaction effect).

3) Low HO students were perceived by high HO teachers as having significantly more character and competence than by low HO teachers (interaction effect).

4) Perceived student humor orientation does not seem to influence teachers' perceptions of student task attraction.

5) Both low and high HO teachers perceive high HO students as significantly more socially attractive than low HO students (main effect).

6) High HO teachers are more lenient with both low and high HO students in terms of overlooking student misbehaviors than low HO teachers (main effect).

Based on this list of knowledge claims, the following can be concluded (1) teacher and student humor orientations interact to significantly influence teachers' perceptions of student credibility, (2) perceived student humor influences positively teachers' perceptions of student social attractiveness, and (3) teachers' humor orientation trait influences their willingness to overlook student misbehaviors.

<u>Implications for Teachers</u>

Because this thesis examined the effects of student humor from a teacher's perspective, it is necessary to examine the implications of the findings from the teacher's perspective as well. Three implications that may help teachers include (1) understanding better how students' use of humor influences teachers' perceptions of students, (2) understanding better how students may use humor (i.e., function of humor) in the classroom to influence the teaching process, and (3) understanding better how teacher HO may influence teachers' willingness to be lenient in overlooking student misbehaviors.

First, it seems evident from the results of this thesis that low HO teachers perceive high HO students more favorably in terms of character and competence than high HO teachers. This suggests that low HO teachers perceive high HO students as possibly possessing a communication style that is valued and possibly admired by those who do

not possess it. Because this trait is valued, it may influence positively the teacher-student relationship. It could be that high HO students receive some type of preferential treatment from low HO teachers. This same preferential treatment may not be granted to low HO students.

Although there was not a significant difference in how low and high HO teachers perceived high HO students on all of the dependent variables, high HO teachers did not appear to appreciate high HO students as much as low HO teachers. This suggests that the symmetrical relationship between high HO teachers and high HO students may not always be productive in the classroom context. As suggested above, a high HO teacher may perceive the humorous attempts of a high HO student as being competitive with the teacher's own communication style. This clash of communication styles may not be in the student's best interest. Teachers need to be aware of how they perceive the communication style of their students and how these perceptions ultimately influence teacher behavior.

Second, the results of this study also indicate that regardless of a teacher's humor orientation, high HO students were significantly more socially attractive than low HO students. This finding suggests that students may use humor as a persuasive or influence strategy to win over teachers and their perceptions. An individual's perceptions not only influence communication, but behaviors as well. In the context of this study, students may be using humor as a way to unify a relationship between themselves and their teacher while dividing the relationship between other students and the teacher. This effect in essence creates a higher degree of liking between the teacher and one particular student while alienating the rest, ultimately creating the impression of favoritism. A teacher is

trained to remain impartial, unbiased, and objective. Anything that negates these attitudes may impact the classroom climate and ultimately disrupt or diminish student learning.

Third, the findings from the current study suggest that high HO teachers anticipated themselves as being significantly more lenient in overlooking high and low HO students' misbehaviors than low HO teachers. This finding suggests that a teacher's anticipated leniency in overlooking student misbehaviors is influenced by the teacher's humor orientation. In other words, because of the high HO communication trait, high HO teachers may be more willing to overlook students' misbehaviors than low HO teachers who do not possess the same level of humor orientation. Again, teachers need to monitor their communication traits and how these traits may influence their teaching behaviors to insure objectivity in the classroom.

Limitations of the Current Study

There were several limitations to the current study that need to be addressed and corrected before follow-up research pertaining to this topic can begin. These limitations are discussed in the following paragraphs and include sample size, an uncalculated response rate, and the adaptability of the instruments to the instructional context.

First, the current study retained a relatively small sample size. Although questionnaires were mailed to 916 faculty members, only 192 questionnaires were returned. Of those returned questionnaires, 40 subjects were dropped from the analysis due to incomplete data, leaving only 152 subjects. For reasons discussed in Chapter Three, the subject pool and statistical power were further limited by using the extreme conditions approach. To increase statistical power, future researchers are encouraged to

increase the number of experimental subjects in order to obtain effect sizes that may be more meaningful and reflective of the effect.

Second, the eligibility requirements of the subjects made it difficult to assess the rate of return since it was unknown how many of the 916 faculty members were actually eligible to participate in the experiment. Only 152 questionnaires were analyzed in this study. One of the problems with not being able to calculate a response rate is the ability to make an educated guess about the self-selection bias that may skew data (Singleton, Straits, & Straits, 1993). The higher the response rate, the more confident a researcher can be that a cross section of subjects with various individual differences completed the questionnaire. As the response rates decline, researchers must question if a cross section of possible subjects completed the questionnaire or if only a certain type of subject completed the self-report data.

Third, the limited adaptability of the measurement instruments to the instructional context also served as a limitation to the current study. Several faculty subjects returned the questionnaire with qualitative statements written in the margins. These comments questioned the conceptual definitions of humor orientation and social attraction. Some subjects stated that humor had no place in the classroom and other subjects insisted that any relationship with a student outside of the classroom context was inappropriate. Due to the various interpretations of humor and social attraction, those two scales were not found to be the best suited to the instructional context.

The limitations of the current study included a relatively small sample size, the incalculability of the response rate, and the limited adaptability of the instruments to the

instructional context. Now that some of the limitations of the current study have been addressed, directions for future research will be discussed.

Directions for Future Research

Possible suggestions for future research are grounded in the theoretical and methodological explanations for why all five hypotheses were rejected. This section of the chapter offers directions for future research examining humor in the instructional communication context.

First, it seems apparent, due to the inconsistencies of research, that today's researchers may not be ready to predict directional hypotheses without first examining the answers to more general research questions. Asking more questions and finding answers will enable researchers to narrow the relational dimensions of humor and to develop a more consistent idea of what types of humor work (e.g., hostile vs. nonhostile and/or appropriate vs. inappropriate), and how humor functions (e.g., identify, clarify, enforce, differentiate). Until there is a clear theory of humor, and this will come with more research, where logical predictions can be made, researchers should continue to ask research questions.

To further our understanding of humor, future studies should use factorial designs to explain better how humor interacts with other communication and personality trait variables. As previously mentioned, since 1991, only two studies have examined the interaction effect between self-reported and other-reported humor orientations using the HO scale (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991). Future research needs to examine the interaction effects not only between self and other-reported HOs, but also between self-reported high HOs and self-reported low HOs.

In terms of the current study, it is important to not only understand the interactions between self-reported teacher HO and perceived student HO, but to also understand better the interaction between self-reported teacher HO and self-reported student HO. In other words, how do self-reported high HO teachers and self-reported high HO students interact? How do self-reported low HO teachers and self-reported low HO students interact? How do self-reported high HO teachers and self-reported low HO students interact? This approach would focus more on the actual trait rather than perceiving someone else's trait. In the communication literature, orientation assumes a trait perspective. Most communication traits are examined using self-report rather than other-report measures, which are usually used to examine communication styles.

Second, future research should account for individual differences such as sex and age of source and receiver of humor. Accounting for individual differences will allow researchers to understand better the effects of humor sources and receivers on dependent variables.

Third, the instruments in this study need to be adapted better to the instructional context. Interpretation variations were evident in the Humor Orientation scale, the Task Attraction scale, and the Social Attraction scale. It appears that the items comprising the Humor Orientation scale were interpreted in a variety of ways among the subjects. The Task Attractiveness scale had a low internal consistency, and social attractiveness was not seen as an appropriate variable for the instructional context. Future research may want to provide a clearer conceptualization of humor in the classroom by offering a more focused definition of humor in the measure's instructions. Additional items could be added to the Task Attraction scale to increase its internal consistency. Finally, the Social

Attraction measure could be better adapted to the classroom by reworking some of the statements to reflect an informal advisor/advisee teacher-student relationship as opposed to a peer friendship relationship.

Fourth, future research should continue to examine the influence that students have on teachers. This thesis reversed the process-product (i.e., teacher influencing student) paradigm of past instructional communication literature and examined classroom communication from the teacher's perspective. Past research has shown that students influence teachers through their nonverbal behaviors, but little research has examined student verbal messages. It is essential to continue this line of research in order to understand more fully how student communication influences teachers and their teaching.

Summary of Thesis

The purpose of this study was to reverse the process-product paradigm of research by examining how the humorous messages of students may influence teacher perceptions and their behavior toward students. Specifically, this study examined how teacher and student humor orientations (HOs) interact to affect teachers' perceptions of student character, competence, social attraction, and task attraction. This study also examined how these relational perceptions may influence teachers' leniency in overlooking student misbehaviors.

The following five hypotheses were tested:

H1: If a student is a high HO and a teacher is a high HO, then the teacher will perceive the student's character dimension of credibility significantly higher than if a student is a high HO and a teacher is a low HO.

H2: If a student is a high HO and a teacher is a high HO, then the teacher will perceive the student's competence dimension of credibility significantly higher than if a student is a high HO and a teacher is a low HO

H3: If a student is a high HO and a teacher is a high HO, then the teacher will perceive the student's task attraction significantly higher than if a student is a high HO and a teacher is a low HO

H4: If a student is a high HO and a teacher is a high HO, then the teacher will perceive the student's social attraction significantly higher than if a student is a high HO and a teacher is a low HO

H5: If a student is a high HO and a teacher is a high HO, then the teacher will be more lenient in overlooking student misbehaviors than if a student is a high HO and a teacher is a low HO.

Subjects in this study consisted of 152 faculty members ranging in professional rank from Graduate Teaching Assistants to full Professors at Southwest Texas State University. All subjects were asked to complete a questionnaire containing a variety of scales including teacher humor orientation, perceived student humor orientation, perceived student credibility (character, competence), perceived student interpersonal attraction (task, social), and teacher leniency. Subjects were also asked to respond to several demographic questions including teacher sex, student sex, and professional rank.

This study used a 2 x 2 ex-post facto, quasi-experimental research design to examine the interaction effects between teacher and student HOs on the five dependent variables. Analyses of variance were computed to test the five dependent variables. Follow-up univariate tests of significant difference were computed to determine

significant differences between the predicted cells. The results did not support the

research hypotheses, therefore all five hypotheses were rejected in favor of the null

hypotheses. Although the null hypotheses were retained in this study, numerous

significant interaction effects and main effects among the five dependent variables were

found.

A summary of the un-hypothesized results suggest the following:

1) Low HO teachers perceive high HO students as having significantly more

   character than low HO students (interaction effect).

2) Low HO teachers perceive high HO students as significantly more competent

   than low HO students (interaction effect).

3) Low HO students were perceived by high HO teachers as having significantly

   more character and competence than by low HO teachers (interaction effect).

4) Perceived student humor orientation does not seem to influence teachers'

   perceptions of student task attraction.

5) Both low and high HO teachers perceive high HO students as significantly

   more socially attractive than low HO students (main effect).

6) High HO teachers are more lenient with both low and high HO students in

   terms of overlooking student misbehaviors than low HO teachers (main

   effect).

Limitations to the current study and directions for possible future research were

suggested. Implications of these finding suggest that high student humor orientation is a

desirable trait, students may use humor in an attempt to purposely influence the teacher,

and humor orientation seems to determine anticipated leniency behaviors.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

Dear Survey Subject,

My name is Angel Manos and I'm a Graduate Student in the Department of Speech Communication. I'm inviting you to participate in a research study investigating communication in the classroom. You were selected as a survey subject based on your instructional experience in the classroom. Unlike most classroom studies, this study focuses on teacher perceptions rather than student perceptions of classroom interactions. As you probably know, obtaining a teacher sample is challenging, so I encourage you to take a few minutes and complete this questionnaire. Your perceptions are important to me. To be eligible to participate in this study, you must teach at least one class of **35 or fewer students.**

Completing this questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes. This survey has been approved by the Southwest Texas State University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and is sponsored by the Communication Research Center in the Department of Speech Communication. Your participation in this project is voluntary and all survey responses will remain confidential and anonymous. Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future with Southwest Texas State University. Your completing and returning this questionnaire will be taken as evidence of your willingness to participate and your consent to have the information used for the purposes of this study.

You may retain this cover letter and this explanation about the nature of your participation and the handling of the information you supply. If you have any questions about the survey, or simply wish to find out more about the study, I invite you to contact me at (512) 245-3856. Your completing this questionnaire will enable me to complete my graduate degree. Thank you for your support.

Completed questionnaires can be return in the enclosed self addressed envelope. Please return via the university mail system to the Department of Speech Communication, Centennial Hall #205, 601 University Drive, San Marcos, Texas 78666.

Angel Manos
Master's Candidate
Department of Speech Communication
Southwest Texas State University

*I would appreciate your completeing and returning the questionnaire ASAP (i.e., within 2-3 days)

APPENDIX B

General Instructions

Version One

General Instructions: In order to complete this set of surveys, you will need to first review the 12th day roster of one of your classes with **35 or fewer** students and identify someone from that roster whom you consider to be **"friendly, highly participative, and spirited and lively."** Please write this student's first name on the top of pages 2-4. Refer to this same student as you complete all the survey items on the following pages. Answer as best you can and remember there are no right or wrong answers.

Version Two

General Instructions: In order to complete this set of surveys, you will need to first review the 12th day roster of one of your classes with **35 or fewer** students and identify someone from that roster whom you consider to be a **"typical"** student. Please write this student's first name on the top of pages 2-4. Refer to this same student as you complete all the survey items on the following pages. Answer as best you can and remember there are no right or wrong answers.

APPENDIX C

FOLLOW UP EMAIL

Good Morning,

My name is Angel Manos and a week ago you received a questionnaire from me pertaining to teacher-student relationships. If you are one of the many people who have already completed the survey and returned it to me I would like to thank you. If you haven't yet filled out the questionnaire I'd like to encourage you to do that now.

Obtaining a teacher sample is difficult, which makes your feedback even more important to me. I realize that your time is important and often limited so the survey will not take more than 15 minutes to complete. If you cannot complete the survey for any reason, please pass it on to a colleague, GTAs included.

Completed questionnaires can be returned via interdepartmental mail in the self-addressed envelope to Angel Manos, Department of Speech Communication, Centennial Hall, room 205.

If I can answer any questions please contact me via email at AM54273@swt.edu or call me at 5-3856.

Thank you for your assistance.

Angel Manos
Department of Speech Communication

APPENDIX D

TEACHER HUMOR ORIENTATION (HO) SCALE

Directions: On the following scales, please circle the number that corresponds most closely with your perception of **your own communication style.** When responding to the statements, please keep in mind your communication behaviors before, during, and after class.

1. I regularly tell jokes and funny stories when I am with a group.
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

2. People usually laugh when I tell a joke or story.
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

3. I have no memory for jokes or funny stories.*
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

4. I can be funny without having to rehearse a joke.
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

5. Being funny is a natural communication style with me.
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

6. I cannot tell a joke well.*
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

7. People seldom ask me to tell stories.*
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

8. Friends of the mine would say that I am a funny person.
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

9. People don't seem to pay close attention when I tell a joke.*
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

10. Even funny jokes seem flat when I tell them.*
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

11. I easily remember jokes and stories.
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

12. People often ask me to tell jokes or stories.
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

13. My friends would not say that I am a funny person.*
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

14. I do not tell jokes or stories even when asked to.*
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

15. I tell stories and jokes very well.
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

16. Of all the people I know, I am one of the funniest.
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

17. I use humor to communicate in a variety of situations.
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

* Statements with an asterisk (*) indicate items that were reverse scored.

APPENDIX E

PERCEIVED STUDENT HUMOR ORIENTATION (HO) SCALE

Directions: On the following scales, please circle the number corresponding with the level of agreement that best **describes the identified student.** When reading the statements please consider the student's communication behaviors before, during, and after class. Again, there are no right or wrong answers.

1. This student regularly tells jokes and funny stories when in a group of people.
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

2. Others usually laugh when this student tells a joke or story.
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

3. This student has no memory for jokes or funny stories.*
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

4. This student can be funny without having to rehearse a joke.
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

5. Being funny is a natural communication style with this student.
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

6. This student cannot tell a joke well.*
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

7. People seldom ask this student to tell stories.*
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

8. Friends of the individual would say that this student is a funny person.
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

9. People don't seem to pay close attention when this student tells a joke.*
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

10. Even funny jokes seem flat when this student tells them.*
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

11. This student easily remembers jokes and stories.
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

12. People often ask this student to tell jokes or stories.
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

13. This student's friends would not say that s/he is a funny person.*
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

14. This student does not tell jokes or stories even when asked to.*
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

15. This student tells stories and jokes very well.
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

16. Of all the people I know, this student is one of the funniest.
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

17. This student uses humor to communicate in a variety of situations.
Strongly Agree   1   2   3   4   5   Strongly Disagree

* Statements with an asterisk (*) indicate items that were reverse scored.

APPENDIX F

CREDIBILITY

Directions: On the following scales, please indicate your impression of the **identified student** by circling the appropriate number between the pairs of adjectives below. The closer the number is to an adjective, the more certain you are of your evaluation.

I consider this student...

Honest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Dishonest*
Untrustworthy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Trustworthy
Honorable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Dishonorable*
Moral	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Immoral*
Unethical	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Ethical
Phony	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Genuine
Intelligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unintelligent*
Untrained	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Trained
Inexpert	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Expert
Informed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Uninformed*
Incompetent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Competent
Bright	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Stupid*

* Statements with an asterisk (*) indicate items that were reverse scored.

APPENDIX G

INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION

Directions: The scales below are designed to indicate how socially and task attractive you find the **identified student** to be. Please circle the number that best indicates your feeling on each of these scales. Numbers "1" and "7" indicate a very strong feeling. Numbers "3" and "5" indicate a fairly weak feeling. Number "4" indicates you are undecided or do not understand the adjectives themselves. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. I think this student could be a friend of mine outside of class.
Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly Agree

2. It would be difficult to meet and talk with this student outside of class.*
Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly Agree

3. This student just wouldn't fit into my circle of friends.*
Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly Agree

4. We could never establish a personal friendship outside of the instructional environment.*
Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly Agree

5. This student is a typical goof-off when assigned class projects/activities/duties.*
Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly Agree

6. I have confidence in this student's ability to complete quality assignments/projects/duties.
Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly Agree

7. If I wanted to get things done I could probably depend on this student.
Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly Agree

8. I couldn't get anything accomplished with this student.*
Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly Agree

* Statements with an asterisk (*) indicate items that were reverse scored.

APPENDIX H

TEACHER LENIENCY

Directions: On the following scales, please circle the number that reflects your likelihood of overlooking the **identified student** engaging in one of the following student misbehaviors.

How likely are you to overlook this student...

1. Missing class for no apparent reason.
Not Likely   1   2   3   4   5   Very Likely

2. Leaving class early or arriving to class late for no apparent reason.
Not Likely   1   2   3   4   5   Very Likely

3. Turning in incomplete homework assignments for no apparent reason.
Not Likely   1   2   3   4   5   Very Likely

4. Dozing off during class.
Not Likely   1   2   3   4   5   Very Likely

5. Completing other course work during class.
Not Likely   1   2   3   4   5   Very Likely

6. Reading the newspaper during class.
Not Likely   1   2   3   4   5   Very Likely

7. Allowing his/her cell phone to ring during class.
Not Likely   1   2   3   4   5   Very Likely

How likely are you to overlook this student...

8. Being unresponsive during class.
Not Likely   1   2   3   4   5   Very Likely

9. Interrupting class by talking to friends.
Not Likely   1   2   3   4   5   Very Likely

10. Coming to class unprepared.
Not Likely   1   2   3   4   5   Very Likely

11. Cheating on projects/assignments/tests.
Not Likely   1   2   3   4   5   Very Likely

12 Challenging your authority as a teacher.
Not Likely   1   2   3   4   5   Very Likely

13. Antagonizing other students during class.
Not Likely   1   2   3   4   5   Very Likely

14. Using inappropriate language during class.
Not Likely   1   2   3   4   5   Very Likely

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Angel Barringer Manos was born in Las Vegas, Nevada on May 14, 1973. She is the daughter of Gayle Speight Manos and Theodore James Manos. Angel has one older sister, Chrys Avery Manos. After completing her secondary education at Bishop Gorman High School in Las Vegas, Nevada, Ms. Manos entered the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, Colorado during the fall of 1991. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Speech Communication with an emphasis in Human Communication and a minor in Psychology in 1995.

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