

CRACKING WISE TO BREAK THE ICE:
THE ROLE OF IDENTITY AND HUMOR ON INTERGROUP JUDGMENTS

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Abstract

Ironically, anecdotal and psychological evidence suggests that humor which deprecates social groups has the potential to improve some interpersonal and intergroup perceptions. However, these findings have only been demonstrated in contexts in which stigmatized group members use humor targeting their own ingroups. Could similar types of humor be used by members of majority groups to improve intergroup perceptions? Does the identity of the joke teller influence how humor that targets social groups is perceived? Three experiments explored the impact of humor on perceptions of joke tellers and the social group targeted by the jokes. In Experiment 1, the effects of deprecating humor were compared to other types of humor when used by a minority group target (a replication of Focella, 2013). In Experiment 2, the effects of deprecating humor were compared between minority and majority group targets. Experiment 3 explored a potential factor affecting the perception of majority group members using deprecating humor – having a romantic partner of the same stigmatized social group as deprecated in the humorous material. Results demonstrated that, while minority group members may reap social benefits from using deprecating humor (e.g., increased perceptions of humor, increased liking), these benefits are not seen when majority group members use deprecating humor (Experiment 2), even when associated with the stigmatized group through a romantic partner (Experiment 3). Further, deprecating humor was demonstrated to increase discrimination against the targeted group (Experiments 1 & 2) and perceptions of prejudiced social

norms regardless of the characteristics of the individual using it (Experiment 2).

The present findings add to our understanding of the social functions of group deprecating humor by examining some conditions underlying when it may or may not be beneficial for perceptions joke tellers and stigmatized groups while suggesting promising avenues for future investigations.

Keywords: Humor, Deprecating Humor, Prejudice

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Steve Carell’s [costume] took two hours to put on, including his hairstyling and make-up. Just for comparison, it took me three hours today to prepare for my role as ‘human woman’.”

— Tina Fey, Golden Globe Award Ceremony, 2015

“Things are going to be a little different at the Oscars. This year, in the ‘In Memoriam’ package, it’s just going to be black people that were shot by the cops on their way to the movies.

...what I’m trying to say is, you know, it’s not about boycotting anything. It’s just, we want opportunity. We want black actors to get the same opportunities as white actors.”

— Chris Rock, Academy Awards Opening Monologue, 2016

“When I say the n-word, Black people are clear I’m on their side. And it’s not disingenuous – I am on Black peoples’ side, clearly... I just happen to be a White guy who writes jokes for a lot of Black comedians.”

— Neal Brennan, Esquire Magazine, 2014

As a co-host of the 2015 Golden Globe Awards, Tina Fey’s quip about Steve Carrell’s drastic makeover for his film *Foxcatcher* humorously acknowledged gender stereotypes to a large, mixed-gender audience. Last year, Chris Rock employed a speech laden with jokes about Black inequality in order to present his views on the “#OscarsSoWhite” protests occurring because of the lack of Black actors nominated for awards. In 2014, Neal Brennan (co-creator of TV’s *Chappelle’s Show*) responded to criticism of using the N-word during his comedy routines by acknowledging his role in the Black comedy community. In each case, the speakers’ quotes reflect the motivation to connect with their audiences in a

potentially tense situation with members of many majority and minority social groups listening. This tension increases specifically because of the intergroup setting in which it occurs.

These settings are associated with increased anxiety, stress, and negative outcomes (e.g., Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002; Toosi, Babbitt, Ambady, & Sommers, 2012). Talking specifically about racial, ethnicity, or diversity issues can increase the tension and exacerbate those outcomes (Sommers, Warp, & Mahoney, 2008). Given the growing awareness of racial and ethnic disparities in social and economic outcomes, it is important to explore methods to increase the amount of productive intergroup discourse where ideas toward the development of effective policies and programs to reduce these disparities can be exchanged (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005).

Considering the examples at the outset, it is plausible humor might have an impact on shifting attitudes and perceptions in intergroup settings (e.g., Focella, 2013). But is it possible these effects change dependent on identity characteristics of the joke teller? In order to address this, I first consider evidence from the psychological literature on factors that influence perceptions during intergroup contact and group-related humor to explore humor's potential to facilitate positive intergroup attitudes and perceptions (e.g., increased liking, prejudice reduction) from both majority and minority group members. Perceptions of the individuals using the humor, perceptions of the stigmatized social group, and theories of humor (e.g., McGraw & Warren, 2010) are examined in order to

provide a complete understanding of the potential role humor plays in these interactions. Then, I outline the method and results of three experiments attempting to clarify how these effects change dependent on various social characteristics of the individuals using the humor – specifically, members of stigmatized minority groups in Experiment 1 (a replication of Focella, 2013), stigmatized minority or nonstigmatized majority group status in Experiment 2, and having a stigmatized or non-stigmatized romantic partner in Experiment 3. Following these experiments, I describe some potential directions for future research examining these effects.

Improving Intergroup Perceptions during Intergroup Contact

The United States is becoming more ethnically diverse. No single racial or ethnic group will be a majority in the US by the year 2055 (Cohn & Caumont, 2016), which will inevitably result in increased contact between members of different racial and ethnic groups. However, investigations on the consequences of intergroup contact have demonstrated that interactions occurring between members of majority and minority groups can be emotionally depleting and cognitively taxing (see Devine, Evett, Vasquez-Suson, & Sorrentino, 1996), and this stress can result in diminished quality of contact in many ways. The threat of appearing biased on the part of majority group members (e.g., Richeson & Trawalter, 2008) or perceiving and confronting potential bias on the part of minority group members (e.g., Barrett & Swim, 1998; Schultz & Maddox, 2013) can hamper individuals' ability to process information and engage in productive

dialogue. For example, Monteith (1993) showed that majority group members highly prejudiced against gays were likely to have inhibited response-times to deprecating jokes against gays, indicating more deliberate cognitive processing. Similarly, Richeson and Shelton (2003) demonstrated that Whites' performance on a cognitive task was worse after a brief interaction with a Black partner over and above a White partner. These effects extend to minority group members as well; for example, Trawalter, Richeson, and Shelton, (2009) find that the perception of being targeted in a hostile or otherwise cognitively demanding intergroup interaction can lead to many responses associated with conversational stress and anxiety (e.g., freezing, avoidance, and various types of conversational overcompensation).

In response to phenomena such as these, a large amount of research has been dedicated to investigating methods that members of both majority and minority groups use to engage in and navigate these stressful social situations (e.g., Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Gaither & Sommers, 2013). For example, Whites who are provided with instructions that help them to reframe the anxiety they anticipate before interracial interactions are more likely to choose to speak with a Black partner about race issues, and they display more positive nonverbal indicators of engagement during those interactions (Schultz, Gaither, Urry, & Maddox, 2015). Similarly, instructing White participants to work toward a positive exchange during interactions (or adopting a "promotion focus") versus to avoid expressing prejudice during interactions (or adopting a "prevention focus")

can lead to fewer signs of cognitive depletion after an interracial interaction (Trawalter & Richeson, 2006). Increased previous contact with minority group members has also been shown to alleviate majority group members' concerns about appearing biased during intergroup interactions (Allport, 1954; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003). Indeed, researchers argue that majority group members exposed to members of minority group prior to interactions are cognitively better equipped to handle these interactions. This contact can either be long-term or even short-term. For example, Gaither and Sommers (2013) demonstrated over the course of two college semesters that White students paired with other-race room mates were significantly more likely to both develop more diverse friendships, rate intergroup interactions as being significantly more important, and even show fewer indicators of discomfort during unrelated intergroup interactions.

Minority group members may also develop coping strategies that potentially alleviate the stress involved with potentially perceiving prejudice during intergroup contact. These strategies are related to *stigma consciousness* (Pinel, 1999), which suggests a certain level of preparation to handle prejudice is associated with growing up with a stigmatized identity. In other words, stigmatized individuals may be more cognitively prepared to handle discrimination from majority group members in part because of previous experiences as members of devalued groups (e.g., Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). For example, a Black person might have experience with being

discriminated against, and may use parts of that experience to influence his or her behavior in future situations in which discrimination might occur (e.g., not directly confronting prejudicial remarks). Still, stigmatized individuals may be at a disadvantage when interacting with others who they perceive to be high in prejudice. Because of this disadvantage, it has become vital for researchers to examine strategies minority group members can utilize in order to manage intergroup situations. For example, Stone, Whitehead, Schmader, & Focella (2011) explored the effectiveness of perspective-taking (e.g., asking one interaction partner to consider the other's perspective on a divisive issue) as a bias confrontation strategy alone, and when preceded by self-affirmation (being reminded of one's positive attributes) as a defensiveness reduction strategy. They found that when Arab-American targets asked White interaction partners self-affirming questions (e.g., "How did someone treat you fairly this week?") before exposure to perspective-taking (e.g., "Think about how it feels to be Arab-American after 9/11."), the White participants were more likely to want to meet their Arab-American partner and reported feeling less confronted than those participants who were only exposed to perspective-taking strategies.

Based on these experimental findings specifically indicating methods minority group members can use to reduce hostility in majority group members, it was suggested by Focella (2013) that humor which acknowledges stereotypes about a stigmatized target's group membership may be able to serve as a strategy to mitigate defensiveness in biased majority group members before directly

confronting prejudice. However, could similar types of humor be used by members of majority groups to improve intergroup perceptions? Does the identity of the joke teller influence how humor that targets social groups is perceived? In order to explore this research and understand the implications of these questions, it is important to first examine the effects of various types of humor on intergroup perceptions and attitudes.

Deprecating Humor and Intergroup Perceptions

Though many types of humor have the potential to influence interpersonal outcomes (e.g., Martin & Kuiper, 2007), the literature exploring humor in intergroup contexts has focused almost exclusively on *deprecating humor*¹, defined as humorous material (e.g., jokes, anecdotes, text, comics, etc.) in which a person, group, or a person's social group membership is belittled, scorned, or repudiated (Zillman, 1983; Ford, 2000). While the intent behind deprecating humor can range from playful to malicious (e.g., Janes & Olson, 2010), it is often viewed as inappropriate or even rude because its characterizations of groups are typically unflattering. For the purposes of the present investigations, deprecating humor can be located on two general dimensions: the *target of focus* (self or other) and the *level of focus* (personal or group). Self-deprecating and other-deprecating humor targets the personal qualities of the joke teller or another person, but both are intended to be largely independent of any of the target's

¹ Though much of the literature on this type of humor refers to it explicitly as *disparagement humor* (e.g., Ford, 2000), this term could be distinct from deprecating humor in its' implied severity. For the purposes of this investigation, the term "deprecating" will be used in place of "disparaging," but further research should be conducted to examine whether distinction between these terms is warranted.

social group memberships. For example, a sighted person might use self-deprecating humor to make jokes about their vision problems, but these jokes would become ingroup deprecating when the person making them is legally blind, thus targeting identifiable characteristics of the individual's social group (the visually impaired) rather than those of the individual alone.

This taxonomy results in four categories (see Table 1) that have been the focus of empirical and theoretical investigations to varying degrees. At the group level, the majority of social psychological investigations on deprecating humor have looked at various outcomes associated with outgroup-deprecating humor. To this author's knowledge, four investigations – one empirical (Focella, 2013) and three theoretical (Rappaport, 2005; Strain, Martens, & Saucier, 2016; Saucier, O'Dea, & Strain, 2016) – have examined outcomes associated with ingroup-deprecating humor.

Table 1.

Types of Deprecating Humor by Target and Level of Focus

<u>Target of Focus</u>	<u>Level of Focus</u>	
	<u>Personal</u>	<u>Group</u>
Self	Self-Deprecating Humor	Ingroup-Deprecating Humor
Other	Other-Deprecating Humor	Outgroup-Deprecating Humor

Self- and Other-deprecating Humor. Self-deprecating humor is a type of humor that individuals use to make fun of themselves directly (Greengross, 2008).

It is commonly used to address perceived deficits in an individual's intelligence, personality traits, moral virtues, mental health, or physical attractiveness, and in conflict resolution or other tense interpersonal events (Lundy, Tan, & Cunningham, 1998). Though beginning a speech with pointed self-deprecation may seem counterintuitive, self-deprecating humor is a tool recommended by many resources designed to help people prepare and execute speeches through its potential to lighten the mood, improve speaker credibility, or create a bond with the audience (e.g., Andeweg, Gagestein, Jong, & Wackers, 2011). Thus, much of the empirical research on self-deprecating humor is related to audience perceptions of speakers, and generally reports relationships between the use self-deprecating humor and perceptions of speaker humor, wit, and general levels of attraction (e.g., Gruner, 1997; Chang & Gruner, 2009). As humor theorist Gruner points out, "Humor that is self-disparaging enhances speaker image... and will have a cushioning effect [on perceptions of the speaker]" (Gruner, 1985, p. 1295). For example, Chang and Gruner (1981) demonstrated the use of self-deprecating humor in speeches has the potential to increase audience-perceived levels of likeability, sense of humor, wittiness, kindness, and trustworthiness. Importantly, the researchers found this same type of humor also has the potential to reduce feelings of anxiety among audience members while simultaneously increasing speaker credibility. But the potential benefit of self-deprecating humor may depend on several factors, such as the goals of the presentation or, importantly, whether the attempted humor is perceived as funny at all (e.g., ; Chang & Gruner,

1981; Andeweg et al., 2011). In addition, I propose later that the effectiveness of deprecating humor relying on social group membership may also depend on whether the joke targets ingroups or outgroups.

Generally, the use of other-deprecating humor (sometimes referred to simply as “ridicule” or teasing; e.g., Janes & Olson, 2000) has negative implications for interpersonal perceptions of the joke teller. Greengross and Miller (2011) explored the implications of humor use for individuals with low or high status (characterized by academic achievement and family background) in a study of mate potential. Participants read scenarios in which an opposite sex target told self- or other-deprecating jokes. Their findings suggested that high status individuals were seen as more attractive when telling self- vs. other-deprecating jokes, while joke type did not influence judgments of low-status individuals. The authors suggest this status disparity in the use of self- and other-deprecating humor reflects the potential of high-status individuals to lose status when they belittle low-status individuals.

Ingroup- and Outgroup-deprecating Humor. As the examples at the outset demonstrate, the context of the delivery of humor is directly related to how it is perceived. This is especially important regarding the racial or ethnic makeup of those listening. Research suggests that canned laughter that is perceived to come from members of an ingroup can make a joke seem funnier than if that laughter is perceived to come from members of an outgroup (Platow et al., 2005). These results can be interpreted through the lens of social influence, suggesting

that people are generally more likely to be influenced by the behavior of ingroups versus outgroups. However, there exists another possibility in the context of intergroup attitudes – as Asian-American writer Liz Lin explains below, the deprecating humor used by members of stigmatized minority groups has the potential to influence how members of nonstigmatized groups behave, often with indignation from members of the group being deprecated:

“I feel conflicted about this on a regular basis, whenever I see an Asian person — be it a friend, a comedian, or a celebrity — make generalizations about Asian people in mixed company. On one hand, it’s great that Asians have other Asians in their lives, either in person or on screen, who can make observations and poke fun at familiar experiences. That’s a beautiful, cathartic thing. But on the other hand, I always tense up a little, worrying that the non-Asians in the crowd will take this person uttering these words as license to do the same. So to anyone who may be uncertain about this: A person of color (or a gay person, or a woman) making fun of their group does not give you permission to make the same joke.”

– Liz Lin (Lin, 2013)

The appreciation of deprecating humor on part of some majority group members could be explained by Zillman and Cantor’s (1976) dispositional theory of humor, which asserts that amusement felt from deprecating humor increases as a function of one’s negative attitudes about the targeted group. Indeed, previous research has demonstrated that the level of amusement elicited by other-deprecating humor depends on the presence and extremity of negative explicit or implicit attitudes toward the targeted individual or group (Lynch, 2010). For example, Cantor and Zillman (1973) found that cartoon protagonists’ humorous misfortunes more viewed as significantly funnier when the characters were first

manipulated to be resented by participants, over and above characters manipulated to garner sympathy from participants.

Building on the hypothesis that encountering deprecating humor can lead to prejudicial responses, Ford and Ferguson (2004) proposed a theoretical model known as Prejudiced Norm Theory (PNT). This model is made up of four propositions that describe mechanisms by which exposure to other-deprecating humor encourages the expression of prejudice against stigmatized group members targeted in the humor. The general implication of these propositions is that individuals who abide to social norms dictating either the suppression or release of prejudice (e.g, Plant & Devine, 1998) can switch to a less serious mindset when listening to other-deprecating humor. These propositions are as follows: (1) Other-deprecating humor allows people to switch from the usual literal and serious mindset for interpreting a message to a noncritical “humor mindset” that trivializes its subject. This implies that one can treat discrimination in a more lighthearted manner. (2) Other-deprecating humor creates a shared understanding (or social norm) of the message if the recipient approves of it or switches to the humor mindset. (3) People should be more likely to interpret other-deprecating humor in a noncritical humor mindset as long as they have attitudes consistent with those conveyed through the humor. (4) Since these people are more likely to interpret other-deprecating humor in a noncritical humor mindset, they are more likely to perceive and assent to a prejudiced norm in their immediate social

context and then use that norm to guide their own responses toward the designated outgroup.

Ford and Ferguson (2004) applied PNT to describe effects related to the perception of sexist humor in men. This investigation found that exposure to sexist humor, over and above non-humorous sexist communication and neutral communication, was found to increase sexist attitudes among those high in hostile sexism. Similar effects have been reported in other investigations on sexist humor; for example, Ryan and Kanjorski (1998) found that college-aged men who perceived sexist jokes to be funny were also more likely to display higher levels of sexual aggression, specifically on self-reported attitudes about forcing sex on women. Additionally, this research found that even women who enjoy sexist humor were also likely to tolerate more interpersonal violence. Other studies have shown men who self-report they have no moral qualms against the use of sexist humor have been shown more likely to indicate signs of rape proclivity following exposure, as well as an increased tolerance of hypothetical situations involving rape (e.g., Romero-Sanchez, Duran, Carretero-Dios, Megias, & Moya, 2010).

These findings of increased tolerance of sexism after exposure to sexist humor extend beyond self-report measures. One study even found a significant relationship between exposure to sexist humor and various discrimination measures (Ford, Boxer, Armstrong, & Edel, 2008). Researchers found that men high in hostile sexism were less likely to donate money to a women's organization (E1) and more likely to endorse the cutting of funds from that

organization after exposure to a sexist comedy skit in an ostensibly unrelated task (E2).

These effects also extend to other traditionally stigmatized groups as well (e.g., Ford, Woodzicka, Triplett, Kochersberger, & Holden, 2013) and can carry equally detrimental consequences. For example, one study found that exposure to Black actors portraying stereotypically Black characters in comedy sketches was more likely to result in higher guilt ratings for a Black suspect in an assault investigation (Ford, 1997). These findings indicate that there are some very unfunny consequences of being exposed to stereotypes about social groups, and that humor which utilizes these stereotypes can create a norm of prejudice tolerance.

The mechanism underlying PNT can be applied to predict attitudes resulting from reciting other-deprecating humor in many different humor contexts with many different social groups. For example, Canadian researchers Maio, Olson, and Bush (1997) found that participants who recited humor deprecating Newfoundlanders reported more negative stereotypes about this group after the recitation. Additionally, Hobden and Olson (1994) reported similar effects when asking people to tell jokes about lawyers, with these individuals reporting lower negative attitudes toward lawyers than their counterparts who were not asked to tell these jokes. Importantly, these effects were shown absent of any baseline prejudice toward these groups from participants, indicating deprecating humor

can create prejudiced norms even among those low in explicit bias toward the targeted group.

Though outgroup-deprecating humor can clearly affect individuals' expression of bias and even endorsement of prejudice and discrimination in the temporary context in which the humor is being perceived, there has been some debate as to whether or not exposure to or recitation of other-deprecating humor has the potential to change individuals' stereotypes and attitudes about targeted groups over time (e.g., Ford, 2000). An investigation by Olson, Maio, and Hobden (1999) suggest that the expression of prejudice might temporarily increase in contexts where other-deprecating jokes are being told or overheard, but the underlying impact on stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination are minimal. Over three studies, the authors exposed participants to either deprecating or non-deprecating jokes about men and lawyers. Of 44 outcome measures related to the extremity of participants' stereotypes and attitudes and 39 additional measures related to the accessibility of stereotypes in general (e.g., stereotypical vs. nonstereotypical interpretations of ambiguous behaviors, for example), only one measure in one experiment found a significant difference between groups exposed to deprecating vs. non-deprecating jokes; in a second experiment, they found participants were more likely to have less favorable impressions of men after hearing a deprecating joke about men.

The pattern of findings in Olson, Maio, and Hobden (1999) may have emerged as a function of the susceptibility of prejudice of the social groups

investigated. It has been demonstrated that PNT may apply more to humor about groups with ambiguous social acceptance (e.g., Arab-Americans, gays) than groups who are clearly not accepted (e.g., racists, terrorists), though this could be a result of a floor effect based on generally negative attitudes toward these groups. Ford et al. (2013) suggest that social groups are differentially susceptible to prejudice from deprecating humor depending on their societal position. Crandall's normative window model of prejudice (Crandall & Warner, 2005) argues that members of a social group occupy one of three positions in society: the left-most position (called the "justified prejudice region"), reserved for those largely agreed upon as deviant (e.g., terrorists), the right-most position (called the "unjustified prejudice region") consisting of groups uniformly considered good (e.g., nurses), and the middle position (called the "normative ambiguity region") comprised of historically disadvantaged groups (e.g., Muslims). The "normative ambiguity region" describes groups once blatantly discriminated against but who are currently treated with ambiguity. It is considered socially unacceptable to express prejudice against those in the unjustified prejudice and normative ambiguity regions. However, prejudice may be expressed against those in normative ambiguity regions in the presence of situational "releasers" (e.g., deprecating humor) that allow for these expressions.

Using Deprecating Humor Strategically. How deprecating humor impacts perceptions of both majority and minority group members is a relatively understudied domain in social psychology. The humorists referenced at the outset

(as well as others) lend credence to the notion that using deprecating humor in various forms can be a viable method for addressing delicate topics related to prejudice and discrimination, at least in large intergroup contexts (e.g., comedy performances, hosting large events). Indeed, some research reports deprecating humor is often used by minority group members in order to discuss complex social issues. For example, Davies (1993) says of his observations of Jewish humor in post-World War II Israel: “Ethnic jokes that are told from the outside as mockery can become assertions of autonomy and vitality when told by the butts themselves.” (Davies, 1993, pp. 33) Davies’ analysis was primarily qualitative and more empirical evidence is necessary in order to critically evaluate these claims. Specifically, empirical research examining how these effects shift between members of majority and minority groups is critical to understanding how humor can function as a tool during intergroup contact.

To date, there has been only one known empirical investigation in social psychology attempting to resolve whether deprecating humor has the potential to generally improve intergroup perceptions involving the use of ingroup-deprecating humor in the context of intergroup relations. Focella (2013) conducted three experiments investigating the effects of “acknowledgement humor,” which is humor designed to acknowledge stereotypes about one’s own stigmatized ethnic identity without explicitly deprecating that identity. Focella (2013, pp. 21) describes this type of humor as distinct from deprecating humor two ways: (1) it is exclusive to members of stigmatized minority groups, and (2)

its content references stereotypes about the targeted group without negatively characterizing those stereotypes. For example, a woman who makes a sexist joke which simply acknowledges another person's stereotypes about women but does not deprecate them (e.g., if a woman showed up late to an event and casually used the excuse "Sorry! As you probably assumed, I took three hours to pick a dress" to acknowledge the commonly held stereotype that women take a long time to prepare for social gatherings) would be using acknowledgment humor. This type of humor is distinct from ingroup-deprecating humor in that it attempts to point out stereotypes about the stigmatized group that another person might hold as opposed to simply explicitly deprecating the group. For example, the same joke would become deprecating if the woman simply humorously deprecated her own social group without acknowledging another person's stereotypes (e.g., "Sorry! I took three hours to pick a dress.")².

Across each of Focella's (2013) investigations, the target was an outgroup member joking about stereotypes that apply to many members of his own group; specifically, an Arab-American (E1) or Muslim (E2 & E3) joking about how many group members wear turbans (acknowledgment humor; all studies) or joking about suicide bombing (deprecating humor; E3) during a getting-acquainted task presented to participants. These conditions were compared to

² This distinction between acknowledgment and deprecating humor could extend beyond acknowledging another person's stereotypes about the stigmatized group. The target in the stimuli used by Focella (2013; E3) for both acknowledgment and deprecating humor conditions referenced the readers' stereotypes about Muslims, for example. The differences between these humor types could be related to perceived severity or accuracy of stereotype information, as well.

“neutral humor” (humor unrelated to the target’s ingroup) and no humor conditions, as well. The first experiment demonstrated that an Arab-American target using acknowledgement humor was able to increase liking among outgroup observers over and above using neutral humor (humor unrelated to the target’s ingroup) and no humor at all.

Similar to research on intergroup interactions which suggest acknowledging one’s potentially threatening ingroup status has the potential to mitigate defensiveness (e.g., Stone et al., 2011), it was demonstrated in Focella (2013; E2) that minority group targets who acknowledge their ingroup also put observers more at ease compared to targets using humor unrelated to their ingroup and targets not using humor at all, and that these ease ratings were partially responsible for acknowledgement humor’s effects on liking. Thus, this experiment concluded that an increase in perceptions of ease mediated humor’s effects on target liking in Experiment 1.

In the third experiment, acknowledgement humor was directly compared to deprecating humor to investigate two phenomena: (1) whether the two types of humor differed in their effects on the designated path to liking developed in Experiment 2, and (2) whether acknowledgement humor resulted in the same effects outlined for deprecating humor in PNT (e.g., increased prejudice and discrimination; Ford, 2000). The results demonstrated that the effects of deprecating humor were similar to acknowledgement humor in that they both increased liking, but the former also resulted in more discriminatory behaviors

especially amongst those high in baseline prejudice against Muslims. Specifically, participants exposed to Muslim targets using deprecating humor about Muslims were less likely to distribute an equal amount of funding to a Muslim Student Association after hearing this humor (over and above acknowledgment humor, neutral humor, and no humor conditions). This effect would be explained well by PNT, but no evidence of changes in perceived local or general norms were documented by Focella (2013; E3). As these changes are central to the mechanism by which PNT is thought to operate, a remaining goal of these investigations could be identifying why levels of discrimination increased with the presentation of deprecating humor.

The Effects of Identity on Deprecating Humor: The Present Research

Experiment 1 sought to replicate some of the results of the investigations by Focella (2013) using a new sample. The goal of this replication was to confirm the effects of deprecating humor on intergroup judgments and establish the experimental manipulation as a useful tool to examine the effects of deprecating humor on intergroup attitudes and discrimination in future research. As was demonstrated in Focella (2013; E3), it was hypothesized that deprecating humor would lead to more negative interpersonal outcomes (e.g, liking), but higher levels of discrimination, and negative stereotyping when compared to acknowledgement humor and humor unrelated to the target's stigmatized identity.

After examining whether these effects replicate with a new sample, Experiment 2 examined differences between the effects of deprecating humor

between majority-group and minority-group targets, which has not been explored in the literature. It was hypothesized that exposure to deprecating humor used by a majority group target would result in more negative interpersonal outcomes (e.g., liking) and higher levels of discrimination and perceptions of prejudiced norms against the stigmatized group, opposed to (1) a majority group target using neutral humor unrelated to the stigmatized group, and (2) a minority group target using deprecating humor about their own group.

Anticipating differences in attitudinal and prejudicial outcomes dependent on the group status of the individual using the deprecating humor in Experiment 2, Experiment 3 examined whether a majority group target with a close romantic partner from a stigmatized group could mitigate negative interpersonal consequences (e.g., liking) and the effects associated with prejudice and discrimination. Since it has been demonstrated that stigma can transfer from stigmatized targets to nonstigmatized targets (e.g., Mehta & Farina, 1988), it was hypothesized that a majority group member with a stigmatized partner would (1) be labelled with more stigma-relevant characteristics, and, when using deprecating humor, (2) be associated with more positive interpersonal outcomes (e.g., liking) and lower levels of discrimination and perceptions of prejudiced norms than a majority group member with a nonstigmatized partner.

Chapter 2

Experiment 1

Three experiments by Focella (2013) supported the claim that acknowledgement humor can effectively increase liking for a stigmatized minority group target compared with humor that does not reference the target's stigmatized group status. However, one investigation in this series (E3) documented increases in target liking as well as increases in discrimination when that target used deprecating humor compared humor unrelated to his stigmatized identity. As elucidating the effects of deprecating humor on intergroup attitudes and prejudicial behaviors is central to the goals of the present set of experiments, Experiment 1 sought to collapse across and replicate Focella (2013, Es 2, & 3). The rationale for this replication was to establish the experimental paradigm used by Focella (2013) as a viable tool (i.e., similar item reliabilities, effective manipulations of target minority group status and humor condition) in examining effects associated with target liking, prejudice, and discrimination (e.g., Ford & Ferguson, 2004) in future experiments.

Hypotheses

As was demonstrated in Focella (2013), it was hypothesized that deprecating humor would lead to increased liking for the target as well as increased factors associated with liking (perspective-taking and putting participants more at ease). However, it was hypothesized that deprecating humor

would lead to higher levels of discrimination, negative stereotyping, and perceptions of both local and general prejudiced norms (Ford, 2000).

Method

Participants

A total of 164 participants were recruited for this study. Four participants failed to complete all measures and were therefore excluded from analyses, leaving a total sample of 160. All participants correctly identified the target as Muslim and were included in subsequent analyses. Participants were roughly 60.5% Female ($n = 98$), and 39.5% Male ($n = 62$). Racially, participants were predominantly White ($n = 121, 74.7\%$), but also Asian ($n = 15, 9.3\%$), Black ($n = 10, 6.2\%$), Pacific Islander ($n = 3, 1.9\%$), and Hispanic ($n = 2, 1.2\%$), with five participants listing their racial group membership as “other” (3.1%).

Design

The present study collapsed across two of the three experiments included in Focella (2013; Es 2 & 3). Participants were randomly assigned (using an online survey randomizer) to a one-way (Humor Strategy: No Humor, Neutral Humor, Acknowledgement Humor, Deprecating Humor) between-subjects design. Participants were assessed on a variety of measures designed to capture their attitudes toward the target, as well as prejudicial behaviors toward the group represented by the target.

Materials and Procedure

All materials were adapted from those used in Focella (2013; Es 2 & 3), with appropriate adjustments made to reflect the change in sample location (changing all references to universities and university-sponsored groups and organizations) and experiment format (computer-based).

Participants were invited to participate in a study titled “Evaluating Class Activities” (see Appendix A). After obtaining informed consent, they were brought into an isolated cubicle where they would perform the task on a computer. They were then shown the following prompt:

In the following section, you will be asked to evaluate a "getting acquainted" exercise for use in classrooms by new professors. These are the ice-breakers professors use at the beginnings of semesters, allowing students to introduce themselves both to the professor and each other. In this exercise, students create profiles that are then read by other students in the class.

You will be assigned to read one college student profile, created by a student in a separate experiment, and report your impressions of the student.

In the target profile ostensibly written by a student, the student was identified as “Ahmad Hassan,” and various demographic traits about the student were written with the key demographic item being religion. The student always identified as a male, age 20, from Boston, Massachusetts, and provided his

religious affiliation as “Muslim.” The prompt then read “Tell us a little about yourself,” which is where the humor strategy manipulation took place, followed by the question “How do you spend your free time?” to which the target always responded with “I like to spend time with friends and listen to music.”

Humor Strategy Manipulation. In each condition, the student responded to the prompt “Tell us a little about yourself” with, “My name is Ahmad Hassan,” Humor strategy was manipulated in the clause ending that response. In the no humor condition, the statement ended “... and I like meeting new people.” In the neutral humor condition, he responded with “...I’m not what people expect when they see me – I’m kind of a bum, but girls say I’m cute, and by ‘girls’ I mean my mom. ☺.” In the acknowledgment humor condition, he responded with “...I’m not what people expect when they see me – but I leave my turban at home. ☺.” Finally, in the deprecating humor condition, he responded with “...I’m not what people expect when they see me – I don’t even know how to pack a car with explosives. ☺.”

Participants were then asked to respond to several measures, described below:

Dependent Measures

Where relevant, reliabilities of composite scale indices are compared to the original Focella (2013; Es 2 & 3) investigations.

Attention and Manipulation checks. After viewing the profile page, participants were asked a series of questions about the target’s characteristics

(e.g., “Was the student male?” and “Was the student from Massachusetts), with the key question being “Was the student Muslim?” Additionally, the participants were asked to rate how humorous and how funny they perceived the target to be on a 1 to 11 Likert-type scale. These two items were averaged to form a manipulation check of the target’s humor (original Cronbach’s $\alpha = .97$, current $\alpha = .94$; Appendix B).

Primary Dependent Measures

Trait Assessments. Participants were then asked to rate the extent to which they agreed the target possessed certain characteristics, all on a 1 to 11 Likert-type scale (see Appendix C). Similar to Focella’s (2013) use of trait characteristics describing negative stereotypes commonly associated with Muslims (Erickson & Al-Timimi, 2001), the traits *spiteful*, *calculating*, *greedy*, *trustworthy* (reverse scored), *angry*, *dangerous*, *close-minded*, and *irrational* were averaged to form a composite measure, “Negative Stereotyping” (original Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$, current $\alpha = .88$).

Liking for the Target. Following the trait assessments, participants then responded to four items on a 1 to 11 Likert-type scale assessing the extent to which they liked the target. These items were (1) “How much do you like this student overall?” (2) “How much would you want to meet this student?” (3) “How much would you want to be friends with this student?” and (4) “How much would you want to work with this student?” These items were averaged to form a

composite variable representing overall liking (original Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$, current $\alpha = .95$)

Discrimination. After completing the above measures, participants were then asked to participate in a separate, ostensibly unrelated study on student perceptions of campus-wide budget cuts similar to the measure used by Focella (2013, E3; see Appendix D) and based off of an original measure of discrimination by Ford, Boxer, Armstrong, and Edell (2008). Participants were asked to complete an exercise from the university's student government in which they would be tasked with cutting the budgets of five distinct on-campus organizations and programs: a Jewish student organization, a Muslim student organization, a women's center, a university model United Nations, and a campus safe ride program.

Local and General Prejudiced Norm Assessments. In line with Ford's (2000) Prejudiced Norm Theory, two items were included to assess the influence of the target's humor strategy on perceptions of prejudiced norms. These items were designed to assess perceptions of local norms and general norms. Local norms were assessed with responses to the question "To what extent do you believe others in the immediate context (those joining you in this session) would approve of cutting funds for each of the organizations below?", and perceptions of general norms were assessed with responses to the question "To what extent do you think the student population in general would approve of cutting funds for

each of the organizations listed below?”. Participants responded to these items on 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree) Likert-type scales.

Secondary Dependent Measures

As in Focella (2013, Es 2 & 3), dependent measures were included to potentially assess the path through which the various humor conditions impacted scores on the “Liking” dependent measure.

Ease. Participants were then asked several questions to report how at ease they felt after viewing the target’s profile. These scores were averaged to form a composite score (original Cronbach’s $\alpha = .72$, current $\alpha = .75$). On 1 to 11 Likert-type scales, participants indicated their agreement with the following items: (1) “This student put me at ease.” (2) “This student would be easy to talk to.” (3) “This student made me feel uncomfortable.” (reverse scored), and (4) “This student made me feel less worried.”

Perspective-Taking. On the same scale, participants were also asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with the following statements: (1) “This student attempted to manage a tense social situation.” (2) “This student understands how others perceive him.” (3) “This student would be able to understand other peoples’ perspectives.” These scores were averaged to form a composite score for perspective-taking (original Cronbach’s $\alpha = .79$, current $\alpha = .75$).

Once participants completed these responses, they were debriefed and excused from the study.

Results

The goal of this experiment was to replicate some of the results of two separate experiments (Focella, 2013; Es 2& 3). However, these previous experiments included a baseline measure of prejudice which was not included in the present investigation. As such, the forthcoming analyses do not include a baseline measure of prejudice, nor any analyses of differences between participants in high- and low-prejudice groups. Accordingly, the analyses used in Focella (2013) have been altered to reflect this change.

Preliminary analyses of the manipulation checks and dependent measures revealed no gender differences, so these analyses have been collapsed across gender and race.

Manipulation Checks

Manipulation Check on Target's Humor. A one-way between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine differences between humor condition on perceived humor. Results demonstrated significant differences between humor groups on this measure, $F(3,156) = 25.40, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .33$ (see Figure 1). Post-hoc analyses revealed no differences between the neutral humor ($M = 8.19, SD = 1.88$), acknowledgement humor ($M = 6.95, SD = 2.24$) and deprecating humor ($M = 7.92, SD = 2.43$) conditions (all $ps > .06$). The no humor condition ($M = 4.16, SD = 2.66$) was significantly lower than all three of the other humor conditions ($p = .03$)

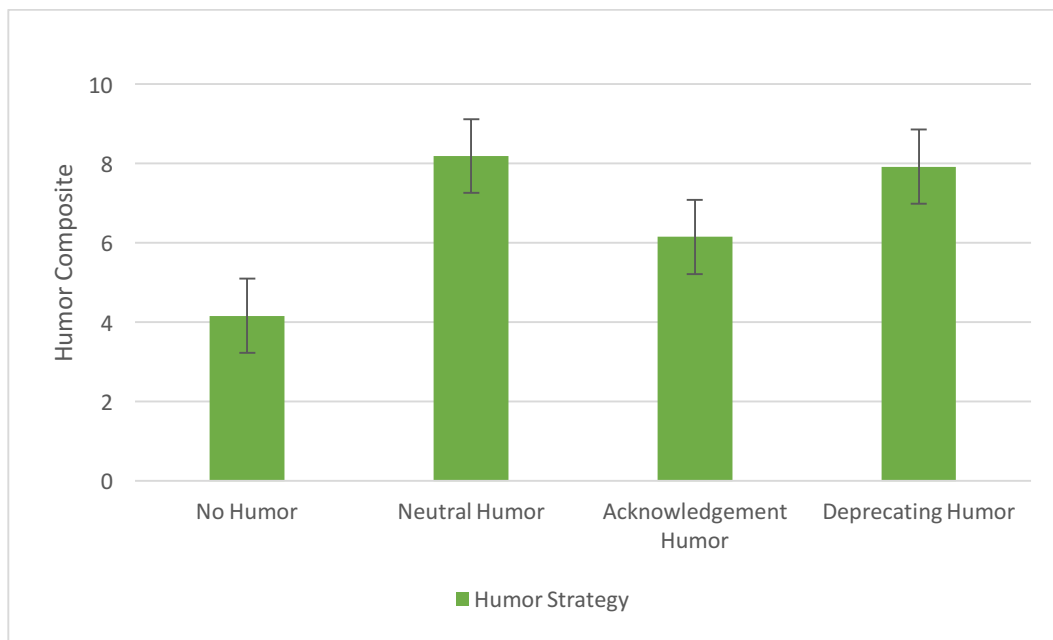


Figure 1. Manipulation check on perceptions of the target's humor in Experiment 1.

Primary Analyses

Negative Stereotyping. A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in negative stereotyping based on humor condition. Results revealed significant differences between groups, $F(3,156) = 8.62, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .14$ (see Figure 2). Consistent with hypotheses, post-hoc analyses showed deprecating humor ($M = 2.91, SD = 1.45$) resulted in more negative stereotyping than acknowledgement humor ($M = 1.83, SD = 1.07$), neutral humor ($M = 1.69, SD = .88$), and no humor conditions ($M = 1.93, SD = 1.28$; all $ps < .001$).

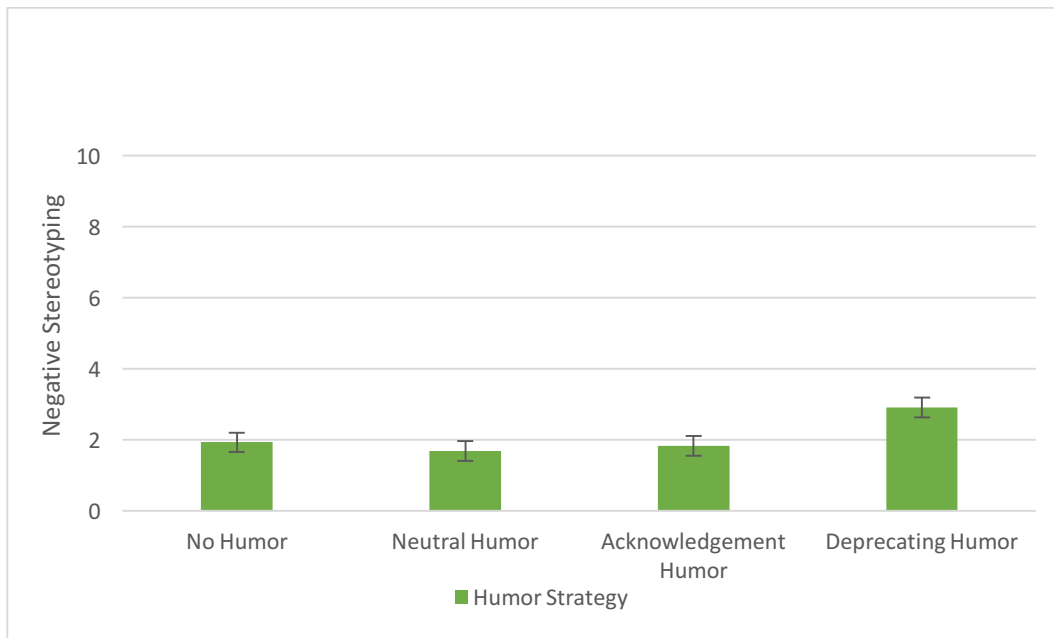


Figure 2. Comparison of negative stereotyping between humor strategies in Experiment 1.

Mediation of Humor Condition on Liking. Contrary to Focella's (2013) results, a one-way between-subjects ANOVA revealed no differences between humor conditions on the liking composite variable, $F(3,156) = 1.36, p = .26, \eta^2_p = .02$ (See Figure 3). Thus, the mediational analyses from humor condition to liking could not be explored in this experiment. However, significant positive bivariate correlations were seen between liking and perceptions of ease ($r = .74, p < .001$) and between perspective-taking and liking ($r = .74, p < .001$).

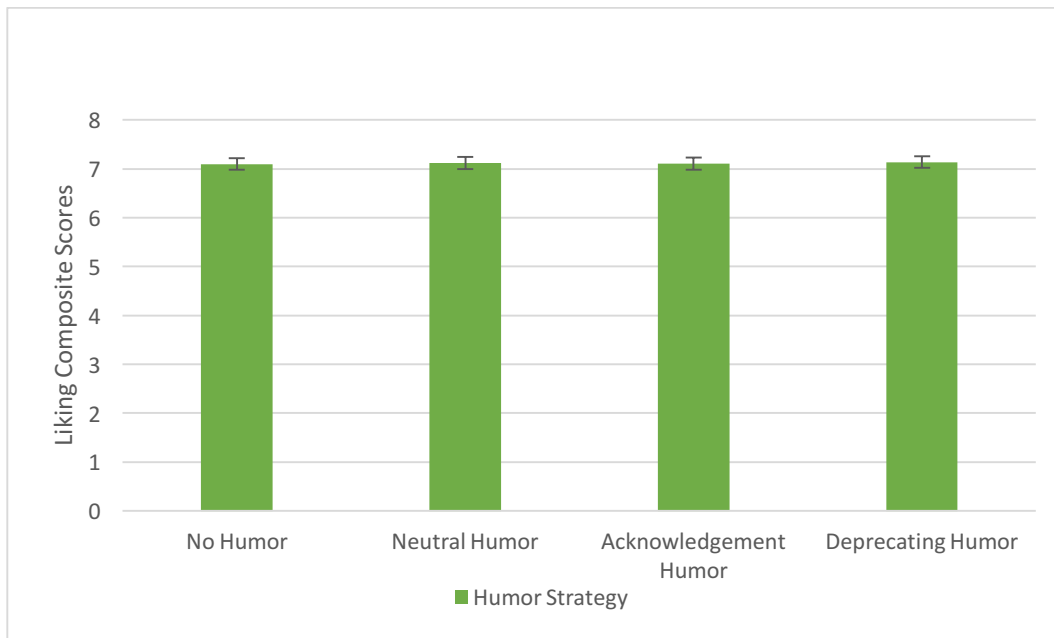


Figure 3. Comparison of target liking between humor strategies in Experiment 1.

Discrimination. In order to establish a measure of discrimination against the outgroup, the proportion of funds cut from the Muslim Student Association was divided by the overall budget cuts in the other organizations, creating a percentage cut from the Muslim Student Organization like the one used by Focella (2013). A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to examine differences between humor conditions on this percentage. Results showed significant differences between groups on this measure, $F(3,155) = 2.93, p < .05, \eta^2_p = .05$. Post-hoc analyses showed that participants exposed to deprecating humor ($M = .31, SD = .10$) were likely to cut more from the Muslim Student Association than those exposed to neutral humor ($M = .24, SD = .12$) and

acknowledgement humor ($M = .25$, $SD = .09$), but not more than those not exposed to no humor ($M = .27$, $SD = .15$; see Figure 4).

Another budget cut measure was used to assess discrimination as well more closely resembling the measure used in Ford et al. (2008). In this version of the budget cuts, the total amount of funding cut from the Muslim Student Association was divided by the total amount of funding offered to the participants to cut (\$24,000). Results showed no significant differences between groups on this measure, $F(3,155) = 1.15$, $p = .332$, $\eta^2_p = .02$.

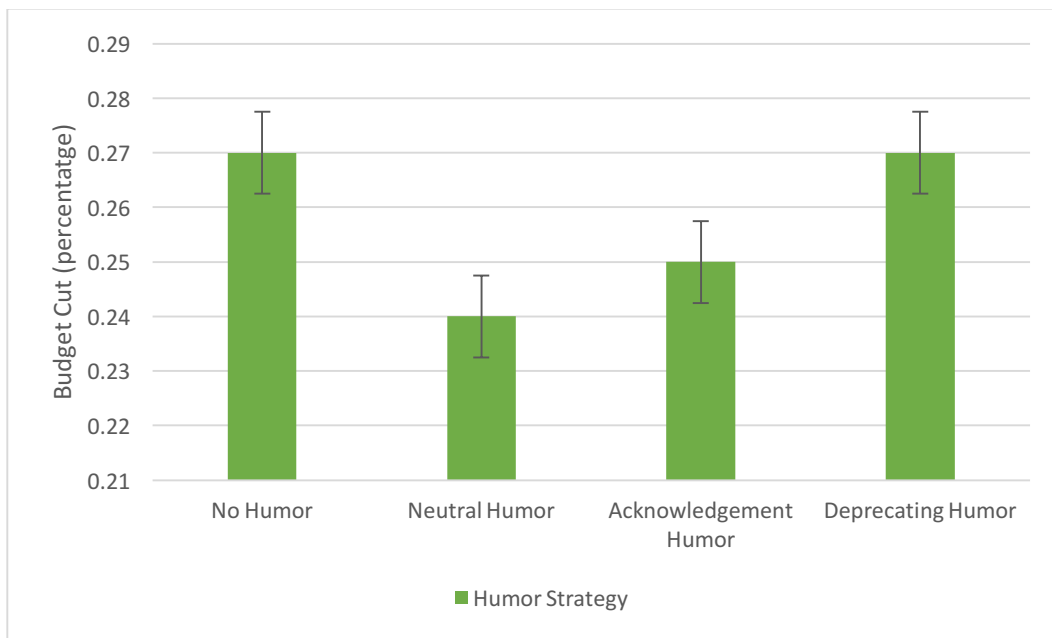


Figure 4. Funds cut from Muslim Student Association by humor strategy in Experiment 1 (original measure: cuts from MSA divided by total cuts from other organizations).

Prejudiced Norm Assessments. Replicating Focella (2013), no differences were seen between humor conditions on perceptions of prejudiced local norms, $F(3,155) = .10, p = .96, \eta^2_p = .00$, or perceptions of prejudiced general norms, $F(3,156) = .91, p = .44, \eta^2_p = .02$.

Discussion

Summary of Results

The results of Experiment 1 display some similarities and some differences with the experiments conducted by Focella (2013). First, exposure to deprecating humor resulted in more negative stereotyping over and above all other humor conditions, similar to Focella's (2013) findings. Also replicating Focella (2013), exposure to deprecating humor resulted in more discrimination against the targeted group compared to exposure to acknowledgement and neutral humor conditions. However, when a new calculation of discrimination was computed (dividing the amount cut from the budget of the MSA divided by the total amount allotted to participants to cut), results showed no differences between humor types. The new calculation of discrimination used in this experiment followed the calculation of budget cuts in Ford et al. (2008), the study from which this measure was originally based.

Unlike Focella (2013) there were no differences seen between acknowledgment and deprecating humor in their effects on target liking, though significant relationships between liking and ease and liking and perspective-

taking were observed. Because significant differences were not observed between humor conditions on the liking variable, an attempt to replicate the mediational path analyses from Focella (2013) was not warranted. Additionally, no differences were seen between humor conditions on perceptions of prejudiced norms at either a local or general level.

Limitations and Implications

Some limitations may account for these results. Importantly, no level of baseline prejudice was taken for the participants in this experiment. Focella (2013) examined and observed differences between two groups of differentially prejudiced participants, and accounting for baseline levels of prejudice may be important in establishing when prejudiced norms occur (e.g., Ford & Ferguson, 2004). The inclusion of an assessment of participants' prejudice in future research could aid in examining these dependent measures from participants with different levels of baseline prejudice. A measure of prejudice could also be useful in controlling for prejudice in order to examine how these effects occur in participants regardless of levels of baseline prejudice.

However, there is little research evincing prejudiced norms increase when stigmatized minority group members use deprecating humor. While the results of Focella (2013; Exp. 3) and one other study (Ford, 1997) suggest that perceptions of prejudiced norms increase when individuals are exposed to deprecating humor used by a member of the group being deprecated, most of the literature on PNT has uncovered these effects when deprecating humor is used by majority group

members or presented to participants without joke teller context (e.g., Hobden & Olson, 1994; Ford et al., 2008), and no direct comparison between minority and majority group members exists in the literature to date. Thus, a gap in the literature on deprecating humor exists in a direct comparison of the effects of deprecating humor used by minority and majority group targets.

Taking these limitations into consideration, it seems parts of the experimental paradigm established by Focella (2013) are a useful in examining the effects of humor on intergroup attitudes, and others are not. For example, the perspective of an in-class activity seemed to be an effective means of communicating humor type from the target, and the items forming the various factors had high reliability (e.g., liking for the target). Also, a version of the discrimination measure used has been tested in previous research on deprecating humor (Ford et al., 2008). However, the assessments of prejudiced norms in this experiment and in Focella (2013) did not directly compare the movement of prejudiced norms from the Muslim Student Association compared to the other organizations. Moving forward, a version of this tool with appropriate adjustments will function as a means of exploring outcomes of different types of humor used by different targets.

Chapter 3

Experiment 2

On the surface, the use of deprecating humor in the service of improving intergroup attitudes seems counterintuitive. However, these jokes typically highlight social disparity and inequality directly, thus providing the opportunity for productive dialogue. As such, there may be a benefit to this type of humor if its usage can be put into the proper context.

Additionally, the perception of humor is important in terms of how humor is perceived; research has demonstrated the strength of humor's persuasive ability (specifically attitude change) is related to the extent to which the humor and the individual using the humor are perceived as humorous (e.g., Markiewicz, 1974; Conway & Dubé, 2002). Therefore, if deprecating humor is intended to improve attitudes, promote positive perceptions, and potentially lead to alleviated anxiety in intergroup contexts, it is important to understand what factors can determine whether or not the humor – and the individual – is perceived as funny.

Recently, McGraw and Warren (2010) proposed the Benign Violations theory of humor that may help to explain when and why deprecating humor is perceived as funny. In this work, they demonstrated that moral or social norm violations perceived in benign contexts were rated as more humorous than when these violations occurred in malign contexts (McGraw & Warren, 2010). There are many contextual factors that could potentially determine whether humor is seen as benign. For example, the psychological distance of a violated norm can

impact how benign it seems (McGraw & Warren, 2012). Additionally, the presence of another social or moral norm that dictates a violated norm is acceptable can result in the perception of humor (McGraw & Warren, 2010; Es 1 & 2). These researchers used the stimulus of a man fornicating with a chicken prior to cooking it to illustrate this example; while one moral norm (bestiality) dictates this behavior is unacceptable, another (harmlessness; i.e., the chicken is already dead) dictates the opposite.

It is possible that stigmatized minority group members using self-deprecating humor, over and above majority group members, are generally viewed as more benign and therefore more humorous. Indeed, an investigation by Borgella and Maddox (in preparation) has produced some results suggesting congruency between the race or religious affiliation of a joke teller and the content of the deprecating joke itself is viewed as more humorous and acceptable. Additionally, as Asian-American writer Liz Lin explains below, it is also the case that majority group members may face negative interpersonal outcomes from using deprecating humor about minority groups:

“I’m regularly surprised by the number of people who don’t know that these kinds of comments aren’t appropriate — that if you aren’t black, you can’t make generalized statements about black people; that if you’re not gay, you can’t make jokes about gay people; and on and on and on. I can make jokes about being Asian because I’m Asian, but if you aren’t Asian, you better not be making Asian jokes. It doesn’t matter where you grew up, how many Asians you went to high school or college with, where you studied abroad or went on vacation, or where you live or work now; you aren’t one of us, and thus you can’t make generalizations about us without sounding like an a-hole. To steal a friend’s analogy: I can make fun of my mom, but you can’t make fun of my mom.”

– Liz Lin (Lin, 2013)

The results of Focella (2013; E3) and the Experiment 1 suggest that exposure to minority group members using ingroup-deprecating humor may lead to increases in discriminatory behaviors by bystanders, but how does this compare to the results typically seen in research on PNT? Ford (1997) found that exposure to Blacks starring in stereotypically Black comedic roles (i.e., using deprecating humor about the stigmatized group) resulted in more anti-Black stereotyping and discrimination than exposure to Blacks in non-stereotypical roles. However, a gap in this literature exists; to date there has been no direct comparison between the results of exposure to stigmatized group members using deprecating humor about their ingroup and majority group members using the same jokes. Whereas the majority of the literature on PNT suggests increases in prejudicial behaviors when exposed to deprecating humor, these studies have focused almost exclusively on majority group targets reciting the humor or the humorous material in isolation. Experiment 2 of this dissertation attempted to compare majority and minority group targets using deprecating humor and examine whether its effects on attitudes toward the target and attitudes toward the stigmatized minority group generally are affected by the group membership of the target reciting the humorous material.

Hypotheses

There are several hypotheses in this experiment based on the literature reviewed. Firstly, I predict that a nonstigmatized target using deprecating humor will be viewed as less humorous, less liked, and less possessing of factors

associated with liking (putting participants more at ease, and perspective-taking) than a stigmatized target using deprecating humor. Secondly, I predict a nonstigmatized target using deprecating humor will result in greater perceptions of prejudiced norms (both local and general norms; Ford & Ferguson, 2004) and greater discrimination against the stigmatized group than a stigmatized target using deprecating humor.

Method

Participants

Originally, 287 participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk data collection service to complete this experiment. Upon review of the data, a total of 47 participants failed manipulation checks: 13 participants misidentified the Muslim target as Christian, 10 were unsure of the Muslim target's religion, four misidentified the Christian target as Muslim, and 20 were unsure of the Christian target's religion. These participants were excluded from the forthcoming analyses, leaving a total of 240 participants.

Design

This experiment was a 2 (target religion: Muslim, Christian) \times 2 (humor type: neutral humor, deprecating humor) between-subjects design. After obtaining informed consent, participants were randomly assigned to one of these four conditions using an online survey randomizer. Because we predicted that differences in baseline prejudice would affect responses on some of the measures (e.g., PNT measures; Ford, 2000), we included baseline prejudice against

Muslims as a covariate in this design. Participants were assessed on a variety of measures designed to capture their attitudes toward the target, as well as prejudicial behaviors toward the stigmatized group represented in the deprecating humor conditions.

Materials and Procedure

Most of the materials and procedure of this experiment were identical to those used in Experiment 1, with several alterations. Firstly, the humor strategy manipulation did not include a “no humor” condition, as this was shown to not produce similar humor ratings as the other conditions. Additionally, no “acknowledgement humor” condition was included because of this experiment’s planned comparisons between deprecating humor and neutral humor conditions. New Muslim deprecating jokes which were pretested to be equal in levels of humor, amusement, offensiveness, and stereotype content were included as well, primarily so both targets (Muslim and Christian) could use the jokes in context (i.e., the Christian target would not be able to use self-referential deprecating humor the same way as the Muslim target). Two jokes per condition were added instead of one in order to control for effects of individual jokes (Muslim deprecating humor and neutral humor, see Appendix E). No significant differences were found between either of the same-category jokes in subsequent analyses.

Secondly, a majority group member condition was added, creating the second independent variable: target religion. This new target had a traditionally

Eurocentric name (Aaron Hayward) and identified as a Christian in his profile. This new target used the same humor content as the Muslim target (either deprecating or not), but the humor was considered outgroup-deprecating because of his majority group status.

Further, in order to allow participants to listen to jokes instead of simply reading them (e.g., Hobden & Olsen, 1994), The written student profiles from Focella (2013) and Experiment 1 with an audio recording of an interview ostensibly between a student and teaching assistant (TA) preparing to participate in a semester-long seminar course. In reality, both were undergraduate actors and trained comedians. The TA interviewed the student as a “getting acquainted” exercise, explaining some of his answers might be used to form groups and aid in activities during the course. During this exercise, the student provided his name, religious affiliation, and told his joke when prompted. The script for this audio file can be read in Appendix F.

Because it was determined in Focella (2013) baseline levels of prejudice might influence reactions toward Muslim targets such that those higher in prejudice would have more negative perceptions of Muslims generally, a measure of baseline prejudice against Muslims and Islam was included in order to control for prejudice amongst participants. For the following experiments, The Islamophobia Scale (original $\alpha = .93$, current $\alpha = .98$; Lee, Gibbons, Thompson, & Timani, 2009; see Appendix G) was used, which contains two subscales composed of eight statements which participants agree or disagree with on 5-point

Likert-type scale: (1) an affective-behavioral subscale which asks specifically about actions related to prejudice against Muslims (e.g., “If I could, I would avoid contact with Muslims”); original $\alpha = .92$, current $\alpha = .97$), and (2) a cognitive subscale, which assesses general feelings about Islam (e.g., “Islam is a religion of hate”); original $\alpha = .94$, current $\alpha = .98$). Combining both subscales provides a measure of cognitive and behavioral bias against Muslims (see Table 2 for descriptive statistics and reliability measurements).

Table 2.

Descriptive and Reliability Statistics for The Islamophobia Scale (Lee, Gibbons, Thompson, & Timani, 2009) used in Experiments 2 and 3.

	<u>Original Scale</u>		<u>Experiment 2</u>		<u>Experiment 3</u>	
	<u>M (SD)</u>	<u>α</u>	<u>M (SD)</u>	<u>α</u>	<u>M (SD)</u>	<u>α</u>
Part 1 (Items 1 to 8): Affective-Behavioral Subscale	4.32 (.85)	.92	4.14 (1.11)	.97	4.07 (1.13)	.96
Part 2 (Items 9 to 16): Cognitive Subscale	3.22 (.92)	.94	3.72 (1.32)	.98	3.76 (1.31)	.97
Total Scale Items (Items 1 to 16)	3.27 (.89)	.93	3.92 (1.16)	.98	3.91 (1.19)	.98

Finally, because this study relied on a sample outside the researcher’s host university, all instructions were altered to reflect the university’s ostensible

interest in obtaining information about university practices (e.g., opinions on course introductory exercises and university budget cuts).

Dependent Measures

The same trait ratings and discrimination measures in Experiment 1 were used for this study, with some alterations. See Appendix C and D for full text. The same traits from experiment 1 were used to assess perceptions of the target's humor (four items, $\alpha = .90$), overall liking (four items, $\alpha = .95$), how at ease participants felt from targets (four items, $\alpha = .86$), and how well participants felt the target was at perspective-taking (three items, $\alpha = .67$). Additionally, the same proportion of budget cuts adapted from the measure used in Experiment 1 was used to assess discrimination against the outgroup. While the same local and general prejudiced norm scales were used here as in Experiment 1, scores representing local and general norms in this experiment were computed by subtracting the average scale rating of the other four organizations from the scale rating for the Muslim Student Association (MSA) in order to get a sense of how attitudes toward the MSA shifted compared to the other organizations. For example, if a participant gave every organization a "4" on each scale (and thus showed no evidence of an increase in prejudice norms), that participant would score a "0" on this updated scale. Scores reflecting a decrease in prejudice norms fall below zero, and scores reflecting an increase in prejudice norms are above zero.

Once participants completed these responses, they were debriefed and excused from the study.

Results

Primary Analyses

The following analyses all used 2 (humor type: deprecating, neutral) \times 2 (target religion: Muslim, Christian) between-subjects factorial ANCOVAs controlling for baseline prejudice toward Muslims ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.15$) as a covariate. Simple effects testing conducted following these analyses were completed using one-way ANCOVAs between the levels of interest maintaining control of baseline levels of prejudice against Muslims. These analyses were used to compare between two targets using two types of humor.

Perception of Humor. Baseline prejudice was found to be a nonsignificant covariate in how participants viewed the target's humor ($p = .81$). Results showed a significant main effect of target religion after controlling for baseline prejudice, $F(1, 235) = 18.81$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .07$. The Muslim target ($M = 7.10$, $SD = 1.92$) was found funnier than the Christian target ($M = 5.95$, $SD = 2.05$) overall. Further, a significant interaction between humor type and target religion was observed $F(1, 235) = 9.98$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2_p = .04$ (see Figure 5). As predicted, simple effects tests revealed the Muslim target reciting a Muslim-deprecating joke ($M = 7.31$, $SD = 1.90$) was found to be significantly funnier than the Christian target reciting the Muslim-deprecating joke ($M = 5.40$, $SD = 2.07$),

$F(1, 115) = 26.31, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .19$. No difference was seen between the Muslim ($M = 6.91, SD = 1.94$) and Christian ($M = 6.60, SD = 1.84$) target telling non-deprecating jokes. Explored another way, the Christian target reciting the Muslim deprecating joke was found to be significantly less humorous than the Christian target reciting the neutral joke, $F(1, 115) = 9.07, p = .003, \eta^2_p = .07$. This difference between joke type was not seen for the Muslim target.

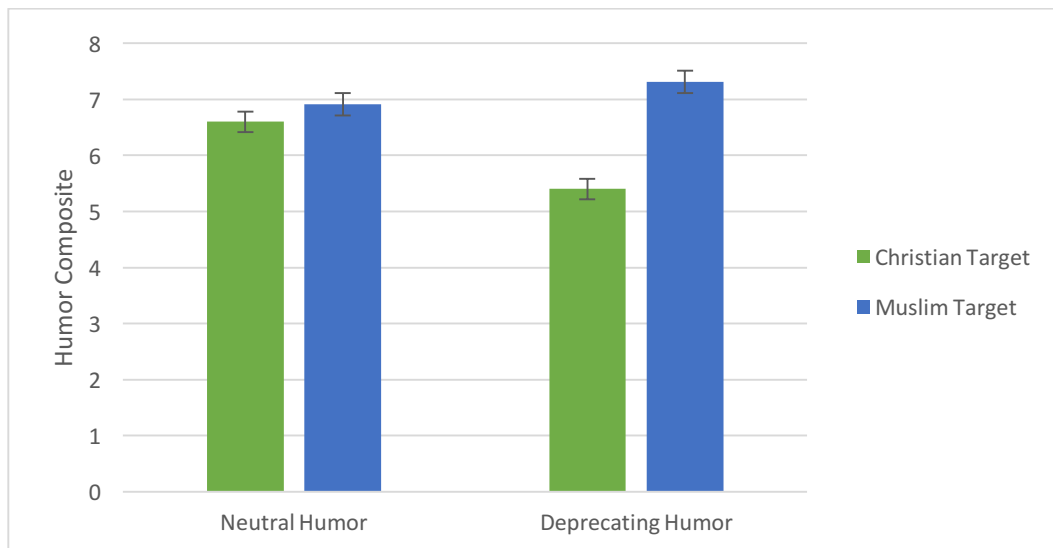


Figure 5. Differences in perception of humor between target religion and humor type in Experiment 2.

Liking for the Target. Baseline prejudice was found to be a significant covariate in participants' liking for the target ($p = .04$). On the composite variable on perceptions of liking toward the target, results displayed a significant main effect of target religion $F(1, 235) = 4.91, p = .028, \eta^2_p = .02$. Muslim targets ($M = 7.74, SD = 2.53$) were liked significantly more than Christian targets ($M = 6.95,$

$SD = 2.65$. Further, a significant main effect of humor type was observed, $F(1, 235) = 12.24, p = .001, \eta^2_p = .05$. Across target religious identities, those who used neutral jokes ($M = 7.87, SD = 2.22$) were liked more than those who used Muslim-deprecating jokes ($M = 6.80, SD = 2.69$). As predicted, there was also a significant humor type by target religion interaction observed, $F(1, 235) = 12.96, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .05$ (see Figure 6). Simple effects tests revealed that the Christian target who used Muslim-deprecating jokes ($M = 5.98, SD = 2.71$) was liked significantly less than Muslim targets using Muslim-deprecating jokes ($M = 7.77, SD = 2.35$), $F(1, 115) = 14.51, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .11$. No differences were seen between Christian targets ($M = 8.09, SD = 2.09$) and Muslim targets ($M = 7.71, SD = 2.32$) using neutral humor. However, the Christian target reciting the Muslim deprecating joke was liked significantly less than the Christian target reciting the neutral joke, $F(1, 115) = 19.22, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .14$, but this relationship between Muslim-deprecating and neutral humor was not observed in Muslim targets.

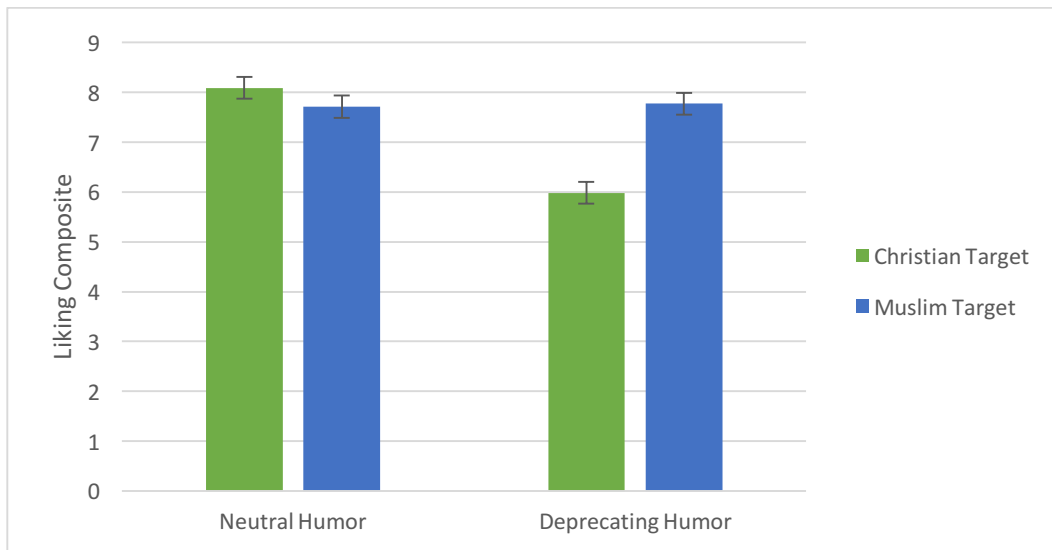


Figure 6. Differences in liking for the target between target religion and humor types in Experiment 2.

Discrimination Toward the Outgroup. Baseline prejudice was found to be a significant covariate in participants' budget cuts toward the MSA after exposure to the target ($p < .001$). The results of the 2×2 between-subjects factorial ANCOVA on the discrimination measure displayed no main effect of target religion, $F(1, 235) = .25, p = .616, \eta^2_p = .00$. Exposure to Muslim targets ($M = .23, SD = .12$) was not more likely to result in discrimination than exposure to Christian targets ($M = .24, SD = .15$). Contrary to predictions, there was no significant interaction between target religion and joke type, $F(1, 235) = .04, p = .841, \eta^2_p = .00$. However, results displayed a significant main effect of humor type, $F(1, 235) = 4.36, p = .038, \eta^2_p = .02$ (see Figure 7). Participants exposed to jokes which deprecated Muslims ($M = .24, SD = .16$) cut significantly more from the MSA's budget than those exposed to neutral jokes ($M = .21, SD = .11$).



Figure 7. Differences in discrimination between humor types in Experiment 2.

Local and General Prejudiced Norms. Baseline prejudice was found to be a significant covariate in participants' estimations of general ($p = .002$) but not general ($p = .09$) norms. Results of the 2×2 between-subjects factorial ANCOVAs showed no main effects of target religion on either local norms [$F(1, 234) = .93, p = .340, \eta^2_p = .00$] or general norms [$F(1, 234) = .002, p = .964, \eta^2_p = .00$]. Further, there was no interaction between target religion and joke type on either local norms [$F(1, 234) = .31, p = .577, \eta^2_p = .00$] or general norms [$F(1, 234) = .44, p = .509, \eta^2_p = .00$]. However, results showed a marginally significant main effect of joke type on perceptions of local prejudice norms, $F(1, 234) = 3.33, p = .06, \eta^2_p = .01$. Participants exposed to Muslim deprecating jokes ($M = .73, SD = 1.70$) were slightly more likely to perceive increased prejudiced local norms than those exposed to neutral jokes ($M = .39, SD = 1.54$). Further, a significant

main effect of joke type was seen in participants' estimations of increased general norms of prejudice, $F(1, 234) = 5.82, p = .01, \eta^2_p = .02$. Similar to perceptions of local norms, participants exposed to Muslim deprecating jokes ($M = .85, SD = 1.44$) were slightly more likely to perceive increased prejudiced local norms than those exposed to neutral jokes ($M = .46, SD = 1.34$).

Further simple effects testing showed a marginally significant difference between Muslim targets using Muslim-deprecating humor and neutral humor, $F(1, 118) = 3.38, p = .06, \eta^2_p = .03$. Exposure to Muslim targets using Muslim-deprecating humor was slightly more likely to lead to increased perceptions of prejudiced local norms than Muslim targets using neutral humor. Christian targets using deprecating humor were significantly more likely to create higher prejudiced general norms than Christian targets using neutral humor, $F(1, 115) = 3.90, p = .05, \eta^2_p = .03$.

Secondary Analyses

Ease. Baseline prejudice was found to be a significant covariate in how at ease participants felt after exposure to the target ($p = .02$). Results showed a significant main effect of target religion after controlling for baseline prejudice $F(1, 235) = 10.95, p = .001, \eta^2_p = .05$. The Muslim target ($M = 8.43, SD = 1.96$) was perceived with more ease overall than the Christian target ($M = 7.42, SD = 2.43$). Results also showed a significant main effect of joke type after controlling for baseline prejudice, $F(1, 235) = 13.51, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .05$. Targets using neutral jokes ($M = 8.44, SD = 1.89$) were perceived with more ease than those

who used Muslim-deprecating jokes ($M = 7.41$, $SD = 2.49$). Further, a significant interaction between humor type and target religion was observed after controlling for baseline prejudice $F(1, 235) = 1.09$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2_p = .05$ (see Figure 8). While no differences in ease were seen between the Christian ($M = 8.41$, $SD = 1.92$) and Muslim ($M = 8.43$, $SD = 1.96$) targets using neutral jokes, the Christian target using Muslim-deprecating humor ($M = 6.58$, $SD = 2.52$) was perceived with less ease than the Muslim target using Muslim-deprecating humor ($M = 8.40$, $SD = 2.07$), $F(1, 115) = 18.23$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .14$. Additionally, the Christian target reciting the Muslim deprecating joke was found to have significantly less ease than the Christian target reciting the neutral joke, $F(1, 115) = 17.39$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .07$. These differences were not seen between Muslim targets using different types of humor.

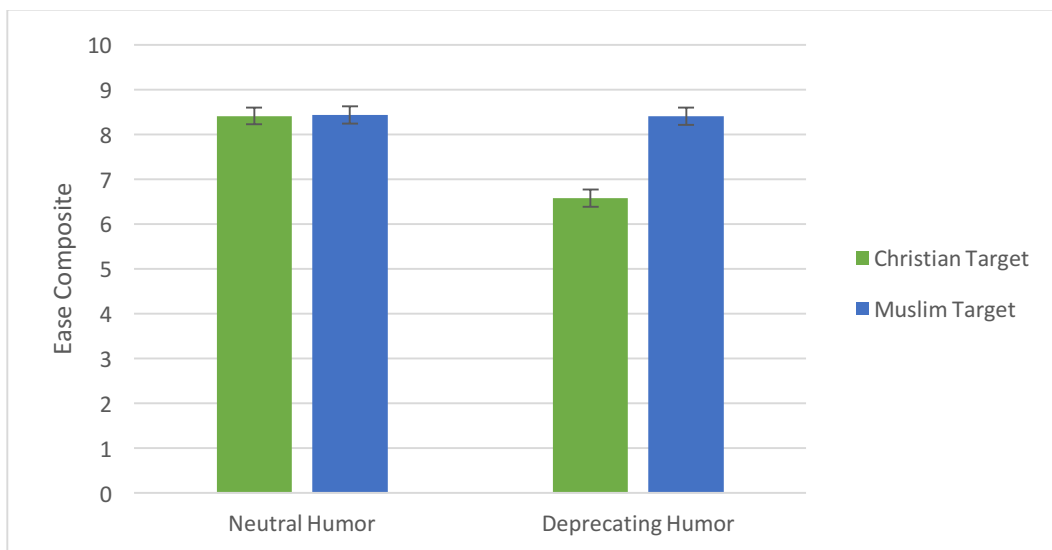


Figure 8. Differences in perceptions of ease between target religion and humor types in Experiment 2.

Perspective-taking. Baseline prejudice was found to be a nonsignificant covariate in how at ease participants felt after exposure to the target ($p = .02$). Results showed a main effect of target religion $F(1, 235) = 8.98, p = .003, \eta^2_p = .04$. Muslim targets ($M = 7.46, SD = 1.79$) were generally seen as better at perspective-taking than Christian targets ($M = 6.64, SD = 2.18$) overall. There was also a significant main effect of joke type, $F(1, 235) = 10.94, p = .003, \eta^2_p = .04$, with neutral jokes ($M = 7.49, SD = 1.82$) associated with better perspective-taking than Muslim-deprecating jokes ($M = 6.60, SD = 2.14$). There was also a significant humor type by target religion interaction seen in the results $F(1, 235) = 11.88, p = .001, \eta^2_p = .05$ (see Figure 9). Simple effects tests showed that Christian targets who used Muslim-deprecating jokes ($M = 5.86, SD = 2.11$) were seen as being significantly worse at perspective-taking than Muslim targets using Muslim-deprecating jokes ($M = 7.47, SD = 1.85$), $F(1, 115) = 18.74, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .14$. No differences were seen between Christian targets ($M = 7.56, SD = 1.92$) and Muslim targets ($M = 7.45, SD = 1.75$) using neutral humor. However, the Christian target reciting the Muslim deprecating joke was shown to be significantly worse at perspective-taking than the Christian target reciting the neutral joke, $F(1, 115) = 17.74, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .13$, but this relationship between joke type was not seen in Muslim targets.

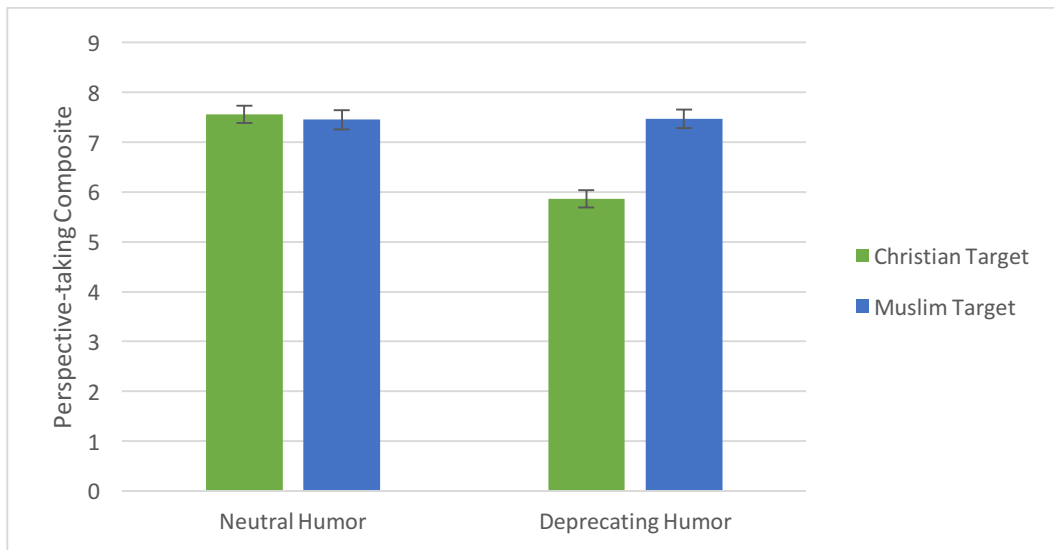


Figure 9. Differences in perceived perspective-taking between target religion and humor types in Experiment 2.

Discussion

Summary of Findings

The results of Experiment 2 demonstrated that the appreciation of deprecating humor is largely dependent on the social characteristics of the individuals who use it. As predicted, participants were significantly more likely to rate a target using deprecating humor with higher qualities related to perceived humor when that target was of the same social group as the group being deprecated (in this case, Muslims). Additionally, and in line with hypotheses, majority group targets using deprecating jokes were likely to be perceived as less humorous than the same targets using neutral jokes. This result adds to the literature on the benign-violations theory of humor (BVT; McGraw & Warren, 2010) by beginning to set up the parameters by which deprecating humor is

typically considered funny. Although investigations of BVT typically include measures associated with the emotions of amusement and disgust (the combination of which has been associated with increases in the perception of humor, e.g., McGraw & Warren, 2012), this experiment found that humor perception *generally* increases in deprecating humor when the joke teller and joke content are congruent. This finding could suggest the malign-ness represented in the deprecating humor used in this experiment was potentially buffered by the benign-ness of the joke teller's identity, but the inclusion of variables that more specifically target factors that influence the perception of benign violations (e.g., perceptions whether the humor is seen as simultaneously amusing and disgusting or wrong and not wrong; McGraw & Warren, 2010: E1, E2) would help pinpoint the causes of this effect.

All of these attributions also displayed significant interactions between humor type and target religion specified in the hypotheses; specifically, minority targets using deprecating humor about their own ingroup were more likely to be perceived as more humorous, possessing greater conversational ease and perspective-taking skills, and more liked by participants when compared with majority group targets using deprecating humor. This result supplements the findings of Focella (2013) and Experiment 1 by showing that minority group members who use deprecating humor against their own ingroup have the potential to increase positive intergroup perceptions over and above majority group members who deprecate other groups.

A distinct pattern of majority group targets being perceived more negatively when using deprecating humor held in a variety of assessments from participants in this experiment. For example, the majority group/deprecating humor target was rated as having less conversational ease, liking, and perspective-taking abilities than the two other conditions it was compared with in the experiment (minority group/deprecating humor and majority group/neutral humor).

While perceptions of majority group members using deprecating humor were predominantly negative, this effect did not translate to increases in discrimination among participants exposed to the majority group target using deprecating humor. However, exposure to deprecating humor, regardless of target religion, was related to increases in the expression of prejudice. Participants were more likely to cut more funding from the Muslim Student Association after hearing a Muslim deprecating joke regardless of the status of the individual telling it. Additionally, this increase in discriminatory behavior was associated with increases in both local and general prejudiced norms among participants.

Limitations and Implications

These results add to the literature on prejudiced norm theory (PNT; e.g., Ford, 1997; Ford, 2000) by suggesting the social status of the individual reciting the humorous material plays less of a role in the perception of prejudiced norms than originally hypothesized. Instead, this experiment suggests that the deprecating joke itself is the main contributor to increases in prejudiced norms

(and consequently, the expression of those prejudiced norms in the form of discrimination).

However, some research on PNT outlines differences dependent on baseline prejudice levels of the individual exposed to deprecating humor (e.g., Ford & Ferguson, 2004). Because this experiment used baseline prejudice against Muslims as a covariate (thus controlling for prejudice), these potential differences were not observed. However, significant differences between levels of the baseline prejudice covariate were observed in two of the measures associated with PNT in this experiment (discrimination and perceptions of local prejudiced norms), indicating differences exist on these measures dependent on levels of baseline prejudice. In future analyses, examining whether baseline prejudice interacts with the other independent variables on these dependent measures might add to the knowledge of how prejudice impacts perceptions of prejudiced norms and discrimination between deprecating humor used by majority and minority group members. If significant interactions between prejudice and other independent variables are observed, it would be interesting to examine how that variable differs on the dependent measures at different levels of prejudice (perhaps using groups of participants at higher and lower levels of baseline prejudice; Focella, 2013).

Additionally, future research could potentially elucidate other issues which may contribute to negative interpersonal perceptions of the majority group target. For example, much of the literature on perceptions of majority group

members in intergroup settings documents these individuals are concerned with appearing prejudiced to both their interaction partners and to observers of the interaction (e.g., Richeson & Shelton, 2007). Having participants in future experiments rate a majority group member in terms of how prejudiced he or she appears after reciting deprecating humor (versus neutral humor) could provide insight into how assessments of prejudice change depending on humor type. These ratings could also be used to accompany the inclusion of measures typically associated with benign-violations (e.g., perceptions of both amusement and disgust, perceptions of whether the behavior seems both wrong and not wrong) to provide a clearer indication of how the perception of humor translates to perceptions of the individual using it.

Taken together, these results about the majority group target using deprecating humor suggest majority group members should not use deprecating humor because of a wide array of potentially negative interpersonal outcomes, in addition to the fact that the jokes are generally perceived as less funny when coming from these group members. However, the presence of this type of humor from personal anecdotes and its prevalence in popular culture (e.g., from comedians like Louis C.K., Neal Brennan, Michael Richards, Anthony Jeselnik) suggest that certain majority group members might be able to use this humor without the negative effects found in the present experiment. In many cases, these individuals defend their jokes by suggesting they are friends with many members of the stigmatized social group (e.g., Justin Bieber publicly criticized for using the

n-word in a racial joke; Lombardi, 2014) Thus, an experiment was designed to determine whether this method of defending the use of deprecating humor on part of the majority group target is effective at muting the negative interpersonal and humor-related effects found in this experiment.

Chapter 4

Experiment 3

It was demonstrated in Experiment 2 that there the perception of humor in deprecating humor is higher in cases where the joke teller is of the same social group as the joke content (over and above when members of majority groups deprecate stigmatized social groups). It also demonstrated that levels of liking, ease, and perceptions of the target managing the social situation increase in these cases when the joke teller and joke content are congruent. This effect may exist because the joke is seen as more humorous (and consequently more persuasive of the target's intentions to manage the social situation; e.g., Conway & Dubé, 2002) because of the benign-ness contributed by the stigmatized status of the target (in line with benign-violations theory; McGraw & Warren, 2010). Additionally, these findings suggest that majority group members may experience negative interpersonal outcomes by using deprecating humor against stigmatized social groups.

However, one need not look too far to find examples of majority group members using humor describing (and often satirizing) inequality between themselves or their social groups and minority groups. This situation is seen frequently in popular culture with comedians like Louis C.K. and Neil Brennan, both popular comedians praised for occasionally illuminating social inequality in their comedy routines through the use of deprecating humor. It can also backfire for the majority group member – for example, pop music star Justin Bieber

recently faced a litany of complaints after making a deprecating joke about Black people (Lombardi, 2014). These examples present seemingly disparate outcomes of using the same type of humor.

Why are some of these individuals and their humor seen as acceptable by many? What factors contribute to the acceptance of this type of humor when recited by majority group members? One possibility is their association with individuals representing the stigmatized groups they deprecate. For example, Justin Bieber claimed his Black friends were accepting of his remarks immediately following the public backlash to his racist remarks (Lombardi, 2014). Asian-American writer Liz Lin has quite different thoughts on the outcomes of majority group members using their minority group member friends to justify deprecating humor:

“I’m never sure where people think they get permission to say these kinds of things. Is it because one of their friends made them an honorary person of color? I get that it’s high praise to be called an honorary person of color, but those designations aren’t universally recognized. The rest of us don’t get a memo saying that it’s okay for this person to make these jokes because they’re one of us. Many of us don’t acknowledge the validity of honorary people of color in the first place, because they aren’t people of color and are thus not privy to that experience. So in case anyone out there isn’t clear, just because your friends don’t mind you saying these things doesn’t mean that other people of color will be okay with it.”

– Liz Lin (Lin, 2013)

It is possible association with stigmatized group members can result in being perceived similar to the “marked” individuals. Research has demonstrated this effect, labelled as *associative stigma* (Mehta & Farina, 1988) or *stigma by*

association (Goffman, 1963), in many contexts. For example, Neuberg et al. (1994) conducted two experiments showing heterosexual friends of homosexuals were increasingly stigmatized, rated similarly to their stigmatized compatriots – that is, viewed with less social comfort – when seen interacting. Similar effects have been shown anecdotally for the direct relatives of individuals with mental illnesses, often leading to thoughts of potentially being mentally ill themselves (Östman & Kjellin, 2002). However, these effects seem pronounced when a nonstigmatized person is romantically involved with a stigmatized person. Goldstein & Johnson (1997) examined the perceptions of the romantic partners of college students with physical disabilities, finding that those individuals were labelled as more trustworthy and nurturing, but also less intelligent, athletic, and sociable – all stereotypes typically associated with the physically disabled. Indeed, experiments by Pryor, Reeder, & Monroe (2012) demonstrated that while stigma-by-association effects were seen in the implicit responses to coincidental social relationships, these effects were more pronounced and explicit when these bonds were seen as meaningful and intentional (e.g., family members, romantic partners).

The threat of stigma by association is salient to people with the potential to experience it. For example, Swim, Ferguson, and Hyers (1999) confirmed this effect by showing women both high and low in prejudice socially distance themselves from a lesbian dissenter in small group interactions, specifically due to fear of being associated with (and categorized alongside) that individual. These

effects can be automatic as well; Kulik, Bainbridge, and Cregan (2008) demonstrated company employees who spend time interacting with stigmatized coworkers (e.g, sexual or racial minorities) were more likely to be automatically associated with (and stigmatized similar to) those individuals. These studies show the idea of stigma by association is implicitly known by many people, and they may make conscious efforts to avoid contact with stigmatized individuals as a result.

Could there be a benefit for humor perception, or a “license” to tell jokes about certain social groups, through a stigma by association effect? In Experiment 3, I attempted to provide evidence for this effect by examining the responses of participants exposed to a majority group target with a minority group long-term romantic partner. Additionally, I examined whether a stigmatized target with additional ties to his stigmatized group status (the presence of a long-term partner from the same stigmatized group) could augment the effects of telling deprecating jokes found in Experiment 2.

Hypotheses

There are several hypotheses in this experiment based on the literature reviewed. Firstly, I predict that a nonstigmatized majority group target with a stigmatized partner will be viewed with more negative stereotypes associated with the stigmatized group than a nonstigmatized target with a nonstigmatized partner (as in Pryor, Reeder, & Monroe, 2012). Secondly, I predict that a stigmatized target with a stigmatized partner will be viewed with more negative stereotypes

than this target with a nonstigmatized partner. Thirdly, I predict that a nonstigmatized majority group target with a stigmatized partner using deprecating humor will be viewed as more humorous, more liked, with more ease, and more capable of perspective-taking than a nonstigmatized target with a nonstigmatized partner using deprecating humor. Lastly, I predict a stigmatized target with a stigmatized partner using deprecating humor will be viewed as more humorous, more liked, with more ease, and more capable of perspective-taking than a stigmatized target with a nonstigmatized partner using the same type of humor.

Method

Participants

Originally, 358 participants were recruited for this study from Amazon's Mechanical Turk data collection service. Several participants failed attention checks and were excluded from analyses: one participant failed to fill out a consent form, three participants were excluded for incomplete data (they were not exposed to manipulations), nine participants misidentified the Muslim target as Christian, 14 participants reported being unsure of the Muslim target's religion, 6 participants misidentified the Christian target as Muslim, 18 participants reported being unsure of the Christian target's religion, and six participants said either student was not in a relationship. These participants were excluded from forthcoming analyses leaving a total of 301 participants in the sample.

Design

This experiment was a 2 (target religion: Muslim, Christian) × 2 (partner religion: Muslim, Christian) × 2 (humor type: neutral humor, deprecating humor) between-subjects design. After obtaining informed consent, participants were randomly assigned to one of these eight conditions using an online survey randomizer. Because we predicted that differences in baseline prejudice would affect responses on some of the measures (e.g., PNT measures; Ford, 2000), we included baseline prejudice against Muslims as a covariate in this design. Participants were assessed on a variety of measures designed to capture their attitudes toward the target, as well as prejudicial behaviors toward the stigmatized group represented in the deprecating humor conditions.

Materials and Procedure

Most of the materials and procedure of this experiment were identical to those used in Experiment 2, with several alterations (for descriptive statistics and reliability measures on the Islamophobia scale, see Table 2).

In the audio recording of the interview between the teaching assistant and student, in addition to asking the student's name (from Experiment 2, either Ahmad Hassan or Aaron Hayward) the TA now asked the student about his relationship status. The student then responded that he had a girlfriend for the past four years, and then either explained that his girlfriend was of the same religious group membership as him or of a different religious group membership (Muslim or Christian). The student portrayed their relationship positively, in line with the

portrayals in previous research on stigma by association (e.g., Goldstein & Johnson, 2010). The student first provided his name, then provided his religious affiliation, then mentioned his partner to the interviewer, and then told his joke when prompted by the TA. The script for this audio file can be read in Appendix H.

Finally, because this study relied on a sample outside the researcher's host university, all instructions were altered to reflect the university's ostensible interest in obtaining information about university practices (e.g., opinions on course introductory exercises and university budget cuts).

Dependent Measures

The same trait ratings and discrimination measures in Study 1 were used for this study, with some alterations. The same traits from experiments 1 and 2 were used to assess the target's humor (four items, $\alpha = .90$), overall liking (four items, $\alpha = .95$), participants' perceptions of ease from the target (four items, $\alpha = .81$), and participants' perceptions of perspective-taking (three items, $\alpha = .51$).

Negative Stereotyping. In order to assess whether stereotypes associated with Muslims were transferred to the majority-group target, thus confirming that the stigma-by-association manipulation was functional, several items were included in the trait rating task which represent these stereotypes (Erickson & Al-Timimi, 2001; see Experiment 1 Method). These traits were *spiteful*, *calculating*, *greedy*, *trustworthy* (reverse scored), *angry*, *dangerous*, *close-minded*, and *irrational*, and were found to be reliable (eight items, $\alpha = .81$).

Once participants completed these responses, they were debriefed and excused from the study.

Results

The following analyses all used 2 (humor type: deprecating, neutral) \times 2 (target religion: Muslim, Christian) \times 2 (target partner: Muslim, Christian) between-subjects factorial ANCOVAs controlling for baseline prejudice toward Muslims as a covariate ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.19$). All reported means and standard deviations were adjusted to levels of this covariate. Simple effects testing conducted following these analyses were completed using one-way ANCOVAs between the levels of interest maintaining control of baseline levels of prejudice against Muslims.

Primary Analyses

Negative Stereotyping. Baseline prejudice was found to be a significant covariate in participants' negative stereotyping toward Muslims ($p < .001$). Results demonstrated no significant main effects between any independent variable (all $ps > .235$), and no interaction between target religion and partner religion ($p = .236$), between target religion and humor type ($p = .614$), between partner religion and humor type ($p = .841$). Contrary to predictions, there was no significant three-way interaction between target religion, partner religion, and humor type ($p = .276$).

Perceptions of Humor. Baseline prejudice was found to be a nonsignificant covariate in participants' perceptions of the target's humor ($p =$

.285). Results showed a significant main effect of target religion on perceptions of humor, $F(1, 292) = 5.23, p = .023, \eta^2_p = .02$. Generally, Muslim targets ($M = 7.04, SD = 1.95$) were perceived as being funnier than Christian targets ($M = 6.52, SD = 2.08$). Further, the results indicated a significant main effect of humor type $F(1, 292) = 3.88, p = .05, \eta^2_p = .01$. Across target religion and target partner conditions, targets using deprecating humor ($M = 6.57, SD = 2.09$) were seen as significantly less humorous as those using neutral humor ($M = 6.99, SD = 1.94$). Replicating the results of Experiment 2, this Experiment also found a significant interaction between humor type and target religion $F(1, 292) = 13.18, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .04$ (see Figure 10). Simple effects tests revealed the Muslim target reciting a Muslim-deprecating joke ($M = 7.22, SD = 1.86$) was found to be significantly funnier than the Christian target reciting the Muslim-deprecating joke ($M = 5.86, SD = 2.10$), $F(1, 147) = 17.40, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .11$. No differences were seen between the Muslim ($M = 6.84, SD = 2.02$) or Christian ($M = 7.14, SD = 1.87$) targets telling non-deprecating jokes $F(1, 152) = .85, p = .358, \eta^2_p = .00$. However, the Christian target reciting the Muslim deprecating joke was found to be significantly less humorous than the Christian target reciting the neutral joke, $F(1, 145) = 15.17, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .10$. These differences between joke type were not seen between Muslim targets, $F(1, 154) = 1.67, p = .199, \eta^2_p = .01$.

In addition to the target religion and humor type interaction, there was also a marginally significant interaction between humor type and partner religion, $F(1, 292) = 2.80, p = .095, \eta^2_p = .01$ (see Figure 11). Simple effects testing on this

interaction showed a marginal effect of partner religion on perceptions of humor in the Muslim-deprecating joke condition – specifically, that collapsing across target religion, individuals using Muslim deprecating humor with a Christian partner ($M = 6.24$, $SD = 2.16$) were viewed as slightly less humorous than individuals using Muslim deprecating humor with a Muslim partner ($M = 6.89$, $SD = 1.98$), $F(1, 147) = 3.57$, $p = .061$, $\eta^2_p = .02$. These differences were not seen in targets with Christian partners, $F(1, 152) = .08$, $p = .775$, $\eta^2_p = .00$.

Contrary to predictions, results showed the 2 (target religion) \times 2 (partner group membership) \times 2 (humor type) interaction effect was nonsignificant, $F(1, 292) = .15$, $p = .702$, $\eta^2_p = .00$.

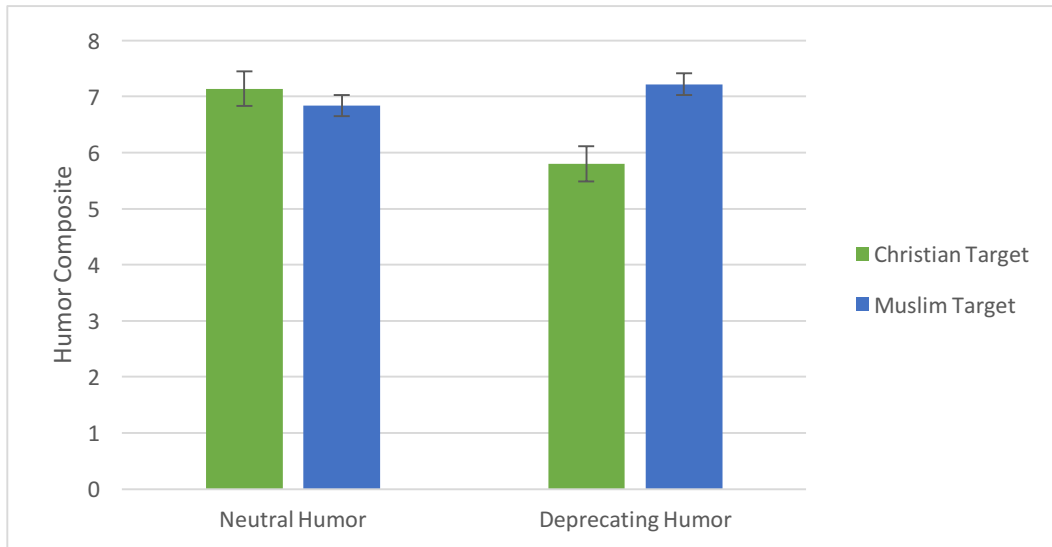


Figure 10. Interaction between target religion and humor type on perceptions of humor in Experiment 3 (collapsing across partner religion).

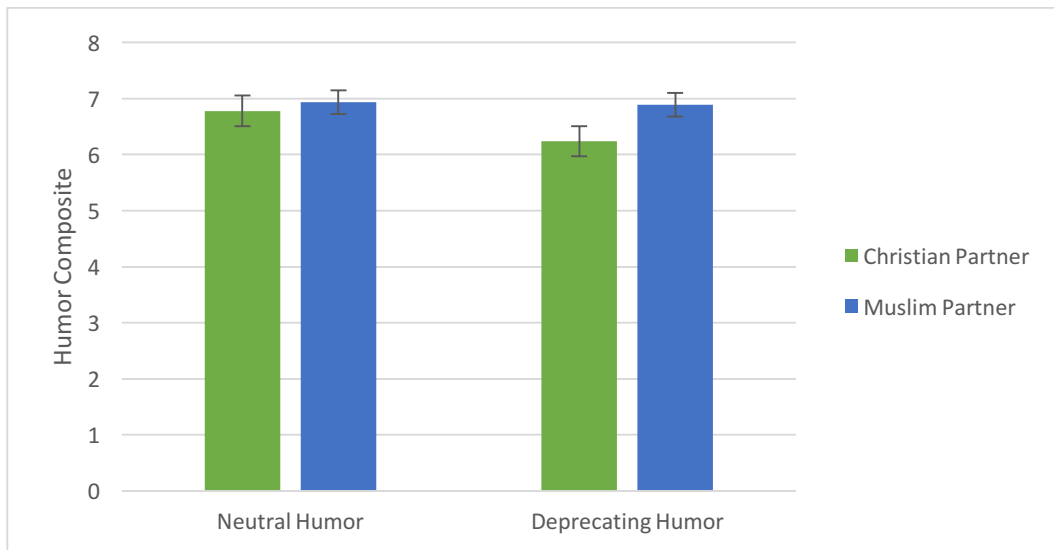


Figure 11. Marginally significant interaction between partner religion and humor type on perceptions of humor in Experiment 3 (collapsing across target religion).

Liking of the Target. On the composite variable on perceptions of liking toward the target, baseline prejudice was found to be a significant covariate ($p < .001$). Results showed a significant main effect of target religion on target liking, $F(1, 292) = 8.74, p = .003, \eta^2_p = .03$. Generally, Muslim targets ($M = 8.22, SD = 2.08$) were liked more than Christian targets ($M = 7.42, SD = 2.58$). Further, the results indicated a significant main effect of humor type $F(1, 292) = 7.78, p = .006, \eta^2_p = .03$. Across target religion and target partner conditions, targets using deprecating humor ($M = 7.48, SD = 2.42$) were liked significantly less than those using neutral humor ($M = 8.17, SD = 2.27$).

Replicating the results of Experiment 2, this experiment also found a significant interaction between humor type and target religion on liking, $F(1, 292) = 14.48, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .05$ (see Figure 12). Simple effects tests showed that the

Muslim target reciting a Muslim-deprecating joke ($M = 8.35$, $SD = 1.87$) was liked significantly more than the Christian target reciting the Muslim-deprecating joke ($M = 6.54$, $SD = 2.84$), $F(1, 147) = 23.96$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .14$. No differences were seen between the Muslim ($M = 8.09$, $SD = 2.27$) or Christian ($M = 8.25$, $SD = 2.29$) targets telling non-deprecating jokes, $F(1, 147) = 1.86$, $p = .12$, $\eta^2_p = .04$. However, the Christian target reciting the Muslim deprecating joke was found to be liked significantly less than the Christian target reciting the neutral joke, $F(1, 145) = 17.52$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .11$. These differences between joke type were not seen between Muslim targets, $F(1, 154) = 1.08$, $p = .301$, $\eta^2_p = .00$.

There was also a significant interaction between humor type and partner religion on liking, $F(1, 292) = 6.602$, $p = .011$, $\eta^2_p = .02$ (see Figure 13). Simple effects testing revealed that collapsing across target religion, individuals using Muslim deprecating humor with a Christian partner ($M = 7.17$, $SD = 2.10$) were liked less than individuals using Muslim deprecating humor with a Muslim partner ($M = 7.79$, $SD = 2.10$), $F(1, 147) = 13.75$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2_p = .02$. Additionally, it was found that targets with Christian partners reciting neutral humor ($M = 8.45$, $SD = 2.29$) were liked significantly more than targets with Muslim partners reciting neutral humor ($M = 7.89$, $SD = 2.25$), $F(1, 152) = 18.34$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2_p = .02$.

Contrary to hypotheses, results showed the 2 (target religion) \times 2 (partner group membership) \times 2 (humor type) interaction effect was nonsignificant, $F(1, 292) = .02$, $p = .898$, $\eta^2_p = .00$.

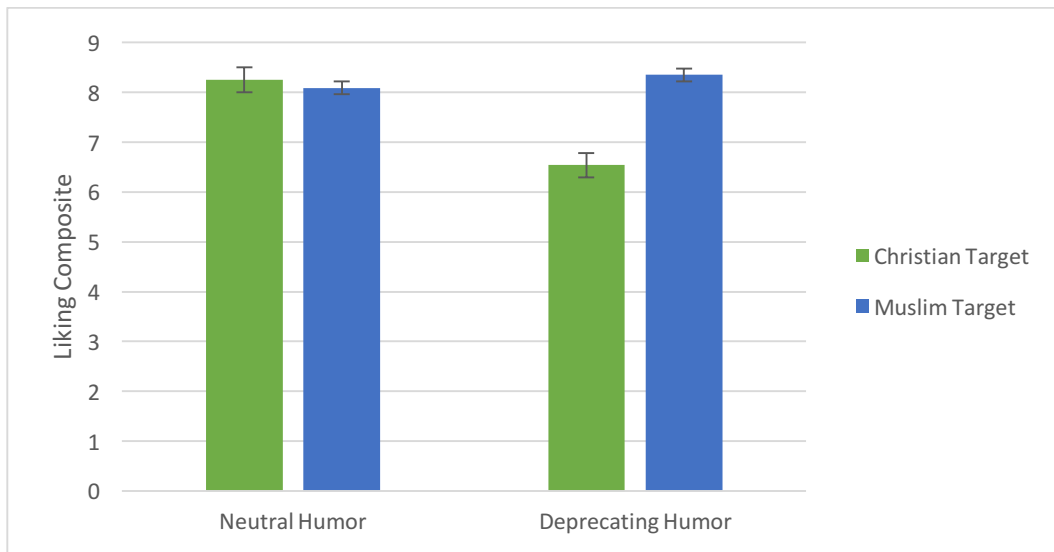


Figure 12. Interaction between target religion and humor type on liking of the target in Experiment 3 (collapsing across partner religion).

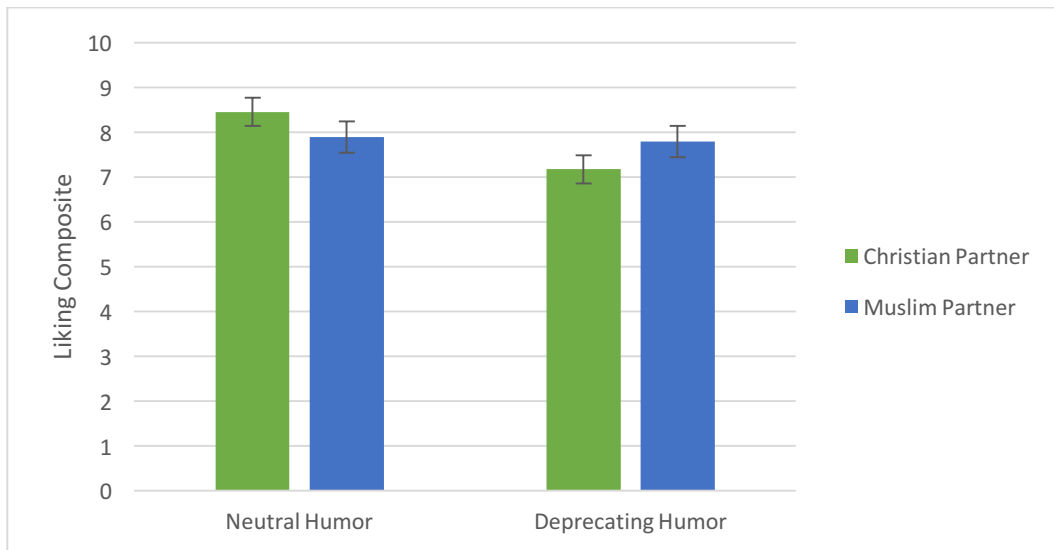


Figure 13. Interaction between partner religion and humor type on liking of the target in Experiment 3 (collapsing across target religion).

Discrimination Toward the Outgroup. Like in Experiment 2, the amount of funding participants cut for the Tufts Muslim Student Association

(MSA) was divided by the total amount of the cuts requested from participants for all five organizations (\$24,000). Baseline prejudice was found to be a significant covariate in participants' budget cuts ($p < .001$). Results demonstrated a marginally significant main effect of target religion, $F(1, 292) = 3.19, p = .075, \eta^2_p = .01$. Overall, exposure to the Muslim target ($M = .21, SD = .14$) resulted in a smaller proportion of budget cuts to the MSA than exposure to Christian targets ($M = .26, SD = .18$). No main effects were observed between humor types ($p = .791$) or partner religion conditions ($p = .146$). Further, no significant interactions were seen between target religion and humor types ($p = .910$), target religion and partner religion ($p = .501$) or between humor type and partner religion ($p = .301$).

Results showed The 2 (target religion) \times 2 (partner group membership) \times 2 (humor type) interaction effect was found to be nonsignificant as well, $F(1, 292) = .00, p = .961, \eta^2_p = .00$.

Local and General Prejudiced Norms. The same items as in Experiments 1 and 2 were used to assess perceptions of prejudiced local and general norms. Like in the previous experiments, these scores were computed by subtracting the average scale rating of the other four organizations from the scale rating for the MSA.

Baseline prejudice was found to be a significant covariate in participants' estimations of local norms ($p = .033$), but not in estimations of general norms ($p = .752$). Results demonstrated no main effects in changes of local norms (all $ps > .404$) or general norms (all $ps > .295$). Additionally, no interaction effects were

observed in either local or general norms. This was true for each of the 2×2 interactions (local norms: all $ps > .23$; general norms: all $ps > .529$), and the $2 \times 2 \times 2$ interaction between target religion, humor type, and partner religion (local norms $p = .140$, general norms $p = .129$).

Secondary Analyses

Ease. Baseline prejudice was found to be a significant covariate in how at ease participants felt after exposure to the target ($p < .001$). Results showed a significant main effect of target religion, $F(1, 292) = 3.63, p = .05, \eta^2_p = .01$. Generally, Muslim targets ($M = 8.56, SD = 1.84$) were perceived with more ease than Christian targets ($M = 8.11, SD = 2.00$). The results also indicated a significant main effect of humor type on perceptions of ease, $F(1, 292) = 7.87, p = .005, \eta^2_p = .03$. Collapsing across target religion and target partner conditions, targets using neutral humor ($M = 8.62, SD = 1.82$) were perceived with more ease than those using deprecating humor ($M = 8.05, SD = 1.99$).

In line with the results of Experiment 2, this experiment also found a significant interaction between humor type and target religion on the ease composite, $F(1, 292) = 9.62, p = .002, \eta^2_p = .03$ (see Figure 14). Simple effects tests showed that the Muslim target reciting a Muslim-deprecating joke ($M = 8.60, SD = 1.79$) put participants more at ease than the Christian target reciting the Muslim-deprecating joke ($M = 7.46, SD = 2.05$), $F(1, 147) = 12.87, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .08$. No differences were seen between the Muslim ($M = 8.53, SD = 1.90$) or Christian ($M = 8.72, SD = 1.75$) targets telling non-deprecating jokes, $F(1, 152) =$

.42, $p = .517$, $\eta^2_p = .00$. However, the Christian target reciting the Muslim deprecating joke was found to put participants less at ease than the Christian target reciting the neutral joke, $F(1, 145) = 15.74$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .10$. These differences between humor type were not seen between Muslim targets, $F(1, 154) = .15$, $p = .700$, $\eta^2_p = .00$.

There was also a significant interaction between humor type and partner religion on the ease composite variable, $F(1, 292) = 4.77$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2_p = .02$ (see Figure 15). Simple effects testing revealed that targets with Christian partners reciting neutral humor ($M = 8.85$, $SD = 8.85$) had higher ease ratings than those with Muslim partners reciting neutral humor ($M = 8.42$, $SD = 1.81$), $F(1, 152) = 3.91$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2_p = .03$. These differences were not observed in the Muslim deprecating humor condition, $F(1, 147) = 1.21$, $p = .273$, $\eta^2_p = .01$

Contrary to predictions about factors associated with liking, results showed the 2 (target religion) \times 2 (partner group membership) \times 2 (humor type) interaction effect was found to be nonsignificant, $F(1, 292) = .05$, $p = .824$, $\eta^2_p = .00$.

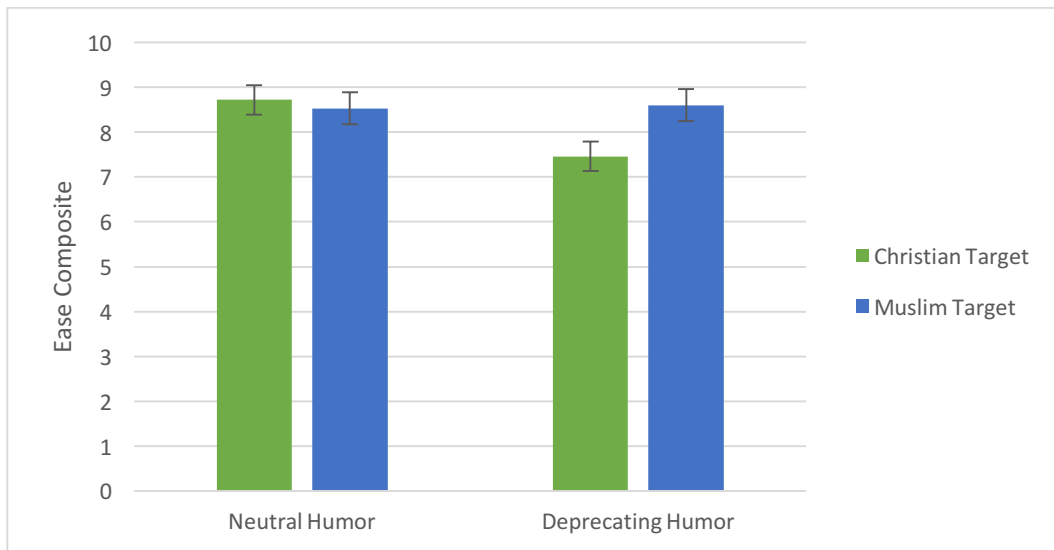


Figure 14. Interaction between target religion and humor type on perceptions of ease of the target in Experiment 3 (collapsing across partner religion).

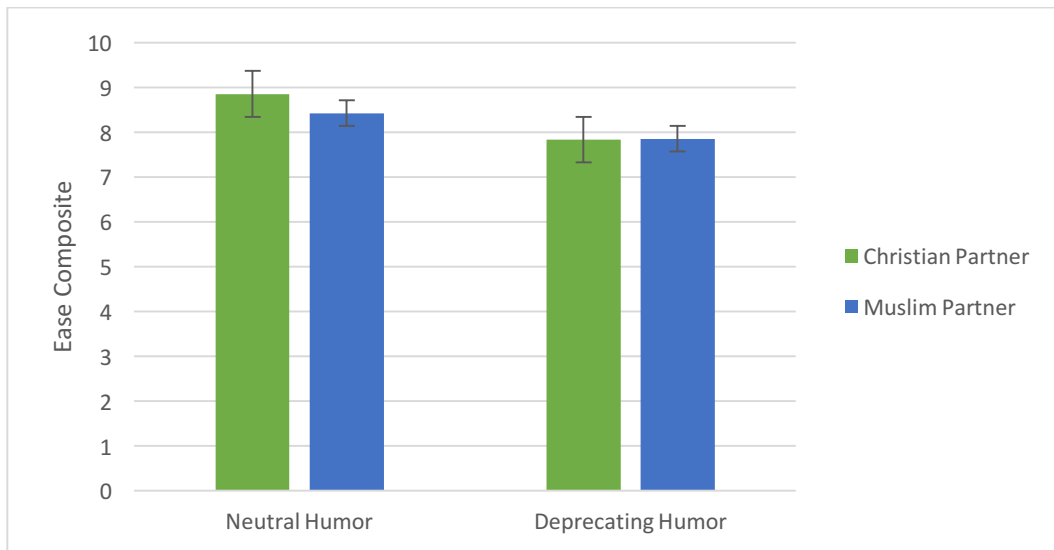


Figure 15. Interaction between partner religion and humor type on perceptions of ease of the target in Experiment 3 (collapsing across target religion).

Perspective-taking. On the composite variable representing perceptions of how well the target managed the social situation, baseline prejudice was found

to be a significant covariate ($p = .031$). Results showed no main effects of target religion, partner religion, or humor condition, and no interaction between target religion and partner religion (all $ps > .211$). However, replicating results from Experiment 2, a significant interaction was observed between target religion and humor type $F(1, 292) = 13.36, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .05$ (see Figure 16). Simple effects tests revealed the Muslim target reciting a Muslim-deprecating joke ($M = 7.61, SD = 1.64$) was perceived as better at perspective-taking than the Christian target reciting the Muslim-deprecating joke ($M = 6.77, SD = 1.76$), $F(1, 147) = 9.02, p = .003, \eta^2_p = .06$. Additionally, the Christian target using neutral humor ($M = 7.74, SD = 1.60$) was perceived as better at perspective-taking than Muslim targets using neutral humor ($M = 7.07, SD = 2.02$), $F(1, 152) = 5.18, p = .025, \eta^2_p = .03$. However, the Christian target reciting the Muslim deprecating joke was rated significantly lower on perspective-taking than the Christian target reciting the neutral joke, $F(1, 145) = 12.23, p = .001, \eta^2_p = .08$. Additionally, the Muslim target using deprecating humor about Muslims was perceived with higher levels of perspective-taking than the same target using humor unrelated to his religion, $F(1, 154) = 3.81, p = .05, \eta^2_p = .02$.

In addition to the target religion and humor type interaction, there was also a significant interaction between humor type and partner religion, $F(1, 292) = 5.36, p = .021, \eta^2_p = .02$ (see Figure 17). Simple effects testing on this interaction showed that targets with a Muslim partner using neutral humor ($M = 7.05, SD = 1.93$) were viewed as less capable of perspective-taking than those with Christian

partners using neutral humor ($M = 7.75$, $SD = 1.70$), $F(1, 152) = 6.36$, $p = .013$, $\eta^2_p = .04$. These differences were not observed in those using Muslim deprecating humor, $F(1, 147) = .57$, $p = .453$, $\eta^2_p = .00$.

Results showed The 2 (target religion) \times 2 (partner group membership) \times 2 (humor type) interaction effect was found to be nonsignificant, $F(1, 292) = .52$, $p = .472$, $\eta^2_p = .00$.



Figure 16. Interaction between target religion and humor type on perspective-taking of the target in Experiment 3 (collapsing across target religion).

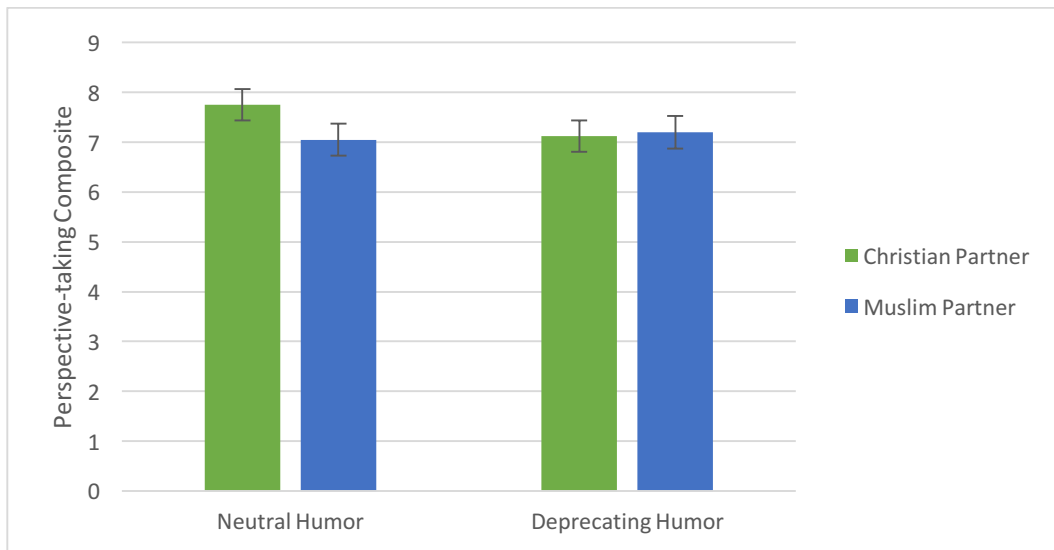


Figure 17. Interaction between partner religion and humor type on perspective-taking of the target in Experiment 3 (collapsing across target religion).

Discussion

Summary of Results

The results of Experiment 3 replicated many of the same effects found in Experiment 2 regarding the interactions between humor style and target religion. It was demonstrated that Muslim targets using Muslim deprecating humor were found to be more humorous, liked more, and perceived with higher levels of conversational ease and perspective-taking abilities than Christian targets who used Muslim deprecating humor. These results stand in contrast to targets using neutral humor, where no differences were seen between Muslim and Christian targets. Additionally, these results replicated another effect found in Experiment 2 – Christian targets who used Muslim deprecating humor were found to experience more negative interpersonal outcomes (specifically viewed as less funny, less

liked, worse at perspective-taking, and put participants less at ease) than Christian targets who used neutral humor.

Contrary to predictions, this experiment did not demonstrate the negative stereotyping effects outlined by many studies on stigma by association (e.g., Goldstein & Johnson, 1997). Though relatively equal levels of negative stereotyping between Muslim targets and Christian targets claiming to have Muslim partners was observed, these levels of stereotyping were not statistically significantly different than Christian targets with Christian partners. This null effect calls into question whether the target's partner's religion actually succeeded in transferring stigma associated with that religious group (Muslims) onto the target. In future experiments attempting to examine these effects, a manipulation check assessing whether participants' recalled the partner's religion (and not simply whether or not the target was in a relationship) would help clarify whether this finding is a result of a failed stigma by association manipulation or simply participants' oversight of the religious background of the partner.

This manipulation was partially based on research by Pryor, Reeder, and Monroe (2012) suggesting the transference of negative affect (and consequently, the same negative stereotypes) from stigmatized targets onto nonstigmatized targets is more likely when the relationship is meaningful (e.g., kinships, romantic relationships) than when it is circumstantial (e.g., casual friendships). For example, Pryor, Reeder and Monroe (2012; Study 1) found that men who were photographed in the company of overweight female relatives (explained to be kin

in the experimental design) were more likely to be linked with common negative stereotypes associated with the overweight.

Limitations and Implications

This experimental design was predicated on the idea that the transferal of negative stereotypes onto a majority group target would change the effects found on our humor, liking, ease, and perspective-taking measures, as well as the effects found on our prejudice and discrimination measures in Experiment 2. The fact that there were no increases on these measures from Experiment 2 dependent on partner religion may be because this manipulation was unsuccessful at associating stigma with a nonstigmatized target. Prior work on stigma by association effects have not demonstrated these effects occur from a stigmatized religious group, but instead have used groups with either visually apparent stigmas (e.g., stigma associated with the overweight; Pryor, Reeder, & Monroe, 2012) or stigmas that were made explicit in the experimental methodology. For example, Swim, Ferguson, & Hyers (1999) examined stigma by association amongst heterosexual close friends of lesbians, but only after the lesbian target voiced her stigmatized status. It is possible these manipulations need to be made more explicit in order to examine stigma by association.

However, some of the lack of stigma by association effects might also be indicative of the short range of the “license” nonstigmatized targets have in using deprecating humor. Across many of the interpersonal measures in this experiment (e.g., liking), no significant differences were seen between nonstigmatized targets

with and without stigmatized partners. This finding may indicate that the presence of a stigmatized partner does not increase positive impressions of a target reciting deprecating humor against a group represented by the stigmatized partner.

The results of this experiment indicate the target's partner, regardless of target religion, did interact with humor type to produce some significant results in the perception of deprecating humor. For example, a marginally significant interaction between partner religion and humor type was seen in perceptions of humor such that targets with Muslim partners using deprecating humor were viewed as more humorous than those with Christian partners using deprecating humor. This effect could be a result of participants viewing the target as more understanding of the stigmatized group and hence funnier when using humor which deprecates that group, regardless of the target's membership in that group. A similar pattern of results was seen in some interpersonal assessments of the target; targets using deprecating humor with Muslim partners were generally liked more than targets using deprecating humor. This effect might have occurred due to the participant understanding the target using deprecating humor had a strong connection to the stigmatized group through his stigmatized partner, again regardless of the target's membership in the stigmatized group.

While similar main effects and interactions between target religion and humor type were seen on the target liking and humor perception, measures in this experiment, the main effects of discrimination and increases in general prejudiced norms between humor type found in Experiment 2 were not replicated in this

experiment. Participants' exposure to a second identity in the experimental design might account for these null main effects on prejudice and discrimination because there was no condition in the present experiment exactly replicating conditions in Experiment 2; that is, each combination of independent variables in this experiment included the presence of a romantic partner for the target regardless of religion. While it was predicted the target's partner would have an impact on interpersonal evaluations of the target (liking, ease, perspective-taking) and on levels of discrimination and the perception of prejudiced norms toward the group targeted by the deprecating humor, a redesign of Experiment 2 would include a "no partner" condition in which the target does not have a romantic partner.

Chapter 5

General Discussion

Taken together, these three experiments provide some evidence on how the use of deprecating humor differentially affects intergroup attitudes, perceptions, prejudice, and discrimination, depending on the characteristics of the people who use it. This research expands upon previous work examining the effects of deprecating humor on intergroup attitudes (e.g., Focella, 2013), prejudice and discrimination (e.g., Ford, 2000; Ford & Ferguson, 2004), and humor perception (e.g., McGraw & Warren, 2010), in several ways.

Summary of Findings

Firstly, it was demonstrated in Experiment 1 that neither acknowledgement humor nor deprecating humor was able to increase liking toward the stigmatized target, not replicating the results found in Focella (2013; E3). This could be due to changes between the samples in which the two experiments were conducted, but this might also be rooted in issues with the experimental methodology (i.e., the use of written humorous material vs. audible humorous material in E2 and E3 of the present investigation). However, results indicating deprecating humor increased discrimination toward the stigmatized group were replicated from Focella (2013; E3). This finding supplements some work indicating that members of stigmatized groups using deprecating humor against their own groups are liable to increase prejudice toward these groups. For example, Ford (1997) found that after viewing race-stereotypic comedy routines

performed by Blacks, White participants were more likely to rate a Black suspect as guiltier in an unrelated task.

Further, in Experiment 2, it was demonstrated the negative effects of deprecating humor on prejudice and discrimination seem to persist regardless of the group membership of the individual reciting the humorous material. It was shown that regardless of whether participants were exposed to a Muslim or a Christian target reciting deprecating humor, participants were more likely to report increases in both local and general prejudiced norms (Ford, 2000), and cut the budget of a Muslim Student Association over and above the cuts toward other organizations (as in Ford et al., 2013). This extends the research on prejudiced norm theory (e.g., Ford & Ferguson, 2004) by demonstrating that members of stigmatized groups are just as likely to contribute to the perceptions of prejudiced norms (and consequently, discrimination) as members of non-stigmatized groups.

However, it was demonstrated in Experiment 2 that the interpersonal outcomes of using deprecating humor do differ between joke tellers. Specifically, a member of the group being deprecated in the humorous material was more likely to be seen as funnier by participants, over and above a majority group member using the same humorous material. If the assumption can be made that perceptions of the humorous material extend to the individual reciting that material, this finding adds to the literature on benign-violations theory (McGraw & Warren, 2010; 2012) by suggesting the identity of the joke teller has the potential to make the social violation of group deprecation seem more benign.

The identity of the joke teller also contributed to how much he was liked when using deprecating humor. Some research suggests that perceiving a sense of humor influences liking toward that individual (e.g., Martin & Kuiper, 2007). For example, in an investigation of collegiate soccer players' evaluations of their coaches, it was found that coaches with higher senses of humor were liked significantly more than coaches without a perceived sense of humor (Grisaffe, Blom, & Burke, 2003). Indeed, this effect extends to both perceptions of liking among both friendships (e.g., Treger, Sprecher, & Erber, 2013) and even romantic relationships (e.g., Buss, 1988). The present research extends these effects to deprecating humor, demonstrating that the identity of the individual reciting the humorous material matters a great deal in terms of both sense of humor perception and, consequently, liking.

In Experiment 3, it was hypothesized that being in a close relationship with a stigmatized group member would dampen some of the negative interpersonal (e.g., decreased liking and perceptions of humor, ease, and perspective-taking) and prejudicial (e.g., increased perceptions of prejudiced norms) consequences associated with being a majority group member telling deprecating jokes in Experiment 2 by associating majority group members with the stigmatized group membership represented in the deprecating joke. Contrary to hypotheses, the role of having a stigmatized partner did not seem to affect participants' perceptions of majority group members who told deprecating jokes. Instead, it was observed that having a stigmatized partner did not affect negative

stereotyping on the majority group target, showing that associative stigma (e.g., Mehta & Farina, 1988) was not observed in this case. It was also demonstrated that the role of the stigmatized partner did not affect how majority group targets were perceived. The majority group member with a stigmatized minority group partner was viewed the same amount of humor, overall liking, ease, and perspective-taking abilities as the same individual with a nonstigmatized partner. This effect could indicate that deprecating humor retains many of its negative effects on intergroup attitudes and perceptions when told by a majority group members regardless of the associations that individual has with the stigmatized group he or she is deprecating.

Limitations and Future Directions

While the present set of studies demonstrated some of the boundaries in how individuals react to deprecating humor in terms of their intergroup attitudes and perceptions, they are certainly not without their limitations. However, they also provide promising avenues for future research. Because I have laid out experiment-specific limitations in each of the experiment discussions, I will discuss some global limitations in this section.

Firstly, these experiments relied on simple question-and-answer jokes as the main manipulation of deprecating humor. However, there have been some theoretical investigations dedicated to identifying differences in types of deprecating humor. For examples, in their analysis of humor surrounding attitudes about rape culture, Strain, Martens, and Saucier (2016) reference two distinct

types of humor – one which supplements rape culture and one which subverts it. *Reinforcing humor* (or *antisocial humor*) is humor that maintains and reinforces the gendered power differential perpetuated by rape culture. This kind of humor serves individuals in socially superior positions, while potentially harming those in inferior positions (e.g., rape victims, women). In line with the effects documented in PNT research (e.g., Ford & Ferguson, 2004), this humor operates by perpetuating inaccurate ideas about rape, overpowering or silencing individuals against whom rape may have been perpetrated, or increasing tolerance of sexist events. It is aggressive in nature, and often takes the form of deprecation conveyed in a “friendly” manner, allowing its deliverer to use the humorous format as a cover for expressing attitudes that may be socially undesirable.

Alternatively, *subversive humor* (or *prosocial humor*) is humor that challenges and subverts the status quo and existing power relationships. In the context of humor regarding rape, subversive humor targets rapists or rape culture in its subtext. It does this by challenging individuals’ acceptance of rape, and thereby increasing the collective awareness of rape as a social problem. It may point out the absurdity of social hierarchy and its continuity, or make individuals who perpetuate these social hierarchies the “butt of the joke.” This type of humor is used frequently in today’s society about many topics and social groups. Take for example the following joke:

“Q: What do you call a Black person flying an airplane?”

A: A pilot, you racist.”

Saucier, O’Dea, and Strain (2016) use the analogy of humor representing a “sword” or a “shield” (Rappaport, 2005) to describe the disparate outcomes of reinforcing and subverting humor, respectively. They also report subversive humor is often prone to misinterpretation as reinforcing humor because it is often delivered through sarcasm or satire, and therefore may be difficult to understand. For example, the authors cite Baumgartner & Morris (2008), who examined the effects of *The Colbert Report* – a television show designed to mock right-wing television programming during the administration of George W. Bush – on attitudes toward conservative personalities and ideologies. Instead of increasing negative attitudes toward the far right, the show was demonstrated to instead increase positive attitudes toward various right-wing attitudes, positions, and leaders.

Subversive humor such as this is likely to produce multiple interpretations and may require additional cognitive processing, background information, and knowledge to grasp the hierarchy-challenging subtext. Therefore, the key to subversive humor’s effectiveness may be the perceivers’ ability to understand the target of the joke. Though there have been no empirical tests regarding individuals’ abilities to distinguish between the idiosyncratic differences of reinforcing and subversive humor, future investigations should consider the potential for subversive humor to facilitate some of the positive intergroup attitudes and perceptions observed in the present research.

Future research might also consider using different social or ethnic groups to examine the effects of deprecating humor on intergroup attitudes. While some research has shown that deprecating humor causes increases in prejudiced norms amongst groups with unstable societal acceptance (e.g., Muslims, gay people) over groups to which prejudice is universally sanctioned (e.g., terrorists, rapists; Ford et al., 2013), the present set of studies only concentrated on one group with unstable societal acceptance. It would be interesting to examine whether these effects maintain for other groups in which deprecating humor is most common.

The present three experiments taken together provide some evidence that majority group members who use deprecating humor can experience negative interpersonal effects from using this type of humor compared to stigmatized minority group members represented in the humor itself. In Experiment 3, this effect was demonstrated to persist despite efforts by the majority group target to identify himself as an associated member of the stigmatized group by referencing his stigmatized minority group member partner. It would be interesting to explore how these effects change in a seemingly nonstigmatized individual with a stigmatized identity revealed prior to reciting the deprecating humor material (e.g., a biracial person, a person with an invisible handicap). It is possible that deprecating humor might operate differently in these contexts than in the contexts provided in Experiment 3.

Conclusion

Humor and laughter are recognized as a powerful social phenomena associated with many positive outcomes, including reduced emotional pain after stressful situations, increased self-esteem, higher levels of interpersonal affection, bonding, agreement, reduced depression, anxiety, and tension, and general regulation of negative emotions (Lefcourt & Martin, 1986; Bonanno, 1997; Gervais & Wilson, 2005). Thus, humor that produces laughter has the potential to benefit a broad range of contexts in which feelings of anxiety may hinder positive outcomes. In the context of a rapidly shifting landscape where social (racial, gender, religious, and socioeconomic) divides seem to be growing while proximity between members of different groups is shrinking, it is vital we retain our senses of humor and use them to communicate effectively and promote positive discourse during intergroup contact.

Appendix A

“Evaluating Class Activities” Exercise based on Focella (2013; E2 & E3)

No Strategy Control

Sex: *Male*

Hometown: *Boston, MA*

Occupation: *Student*

Religion: *Muslim/Islamic*

Age: *20*

Question 1: Tell us a little about yourself. *My name is Ahmad Hassan. I like meeting new people.*

Question 2: How do you spend your free time? Do you have any hobbies? *I'm a pretty regular guy. I like to spend time with friends and listen to music.*

Humor-Only Condition

Sex: *Male*

Hometown: *Boston, MA*

Occupation: *Student*

Religion: *Muslim/Islamic*

Age: *20*

Question 1: Tell us a little about yourself. *My name is Ahmad Hassan. I'm not what people expect when they meet me -- I'm kind of a bum, but girls say I'm cute, and by "girls," I mean my mom.*

Question 2: How do you spend your free time? Do you have any hobbies? *I'm a pretty regular guy. I like to spend time with friends and listen to music.*

Deprecating Humor Condition

Sex: *Male*

Hometown: *Boston, MA*

Occupation: *Student*

Religion: *Muslim/Islamic*

Age: *20*

Question 1: Tell us a little about yourself. *My name is Ahmad Hassan. I'm not what people expect when they meet me -- I don't even know how to pack a car with explosives.*

Question 2: How do you spend your free time? Do you have any hobbies? *I'm a pretty regular guy. I like to spend time with friends and listen to music.*

Appendix A (Continued)

Acknowledgment Humor Condition

Sex: *Male*

Hometown: *Boston, MA*

Occupation: *Student*

Religion: *Muslim/Islamic*

Age: *20*

Question 1: Tell us a little about yourself. *My name is Ahmad Hassan. I'm not what people expect when they meet me – but I leave my turban at home.*

Question 2: How do you spend your free time? Do you have any hobbies? *I'm a pretty regular guy. I like to spend time with friends and listen to music.*

Appendix B

Experiment 1 to 3 Manipulation Check Items (excluding humor manipulation check from Experiment 1)

Information about the Student

Please tell us about some of the characteristics of the student profile that you have evaluated today. If the information was not explicitly provided to you, then please give us your best guess or estimate. Please respond with YES, NO, or NOT SURE.

- 1) The student is male.
- 2) The student is Muslim.
- 3) The student is a chemistry major.
- 4) The student is Hispanic.
- 5) The student is from Massachusetts.
- 6) The student is Native American.
- 7) The student is a psychology major.
- 8) The student is Caucasian.
- 9) The student is female.
- 10) The student is in a relationship*

*Only used in Experiment 3

Appendix C

Traits Used in Experiments 1, 2, and 3 adapted from Focella (2013)

All traits were rated on 1 (not at all descriptive) to 11 (extremely descriptive)
Likert-type scales

1. Funny**
2. Humorous**
3. Irrational*
4. Spiteful*
5. Close-minded*
6. Trustworthy*
7. Calculating*
8. Greedy*
9. Angry*
10. Nice
11. Dangerous*
12. Witty**
13. Offensive
14. Sense of Humor**

*Traits associated with negative stereotypes about Muslims identified in Erickson and Al-Timimi (2001)

**Traits averaged to form a composite for perceptions of the target's humor in Experiments 1 (as a manipulation check), 2, and 3

Appendix D

Tufts Campus Budget Survey and Student Perceptions Questionnaire Items used in Experiments 1, 2, and 3

Next year's funding for registered student organizations at Tufts University have to be cut by 20% (\$24,000) from the 2013-2014 budget of \$120,000. The organizations that will be affected by the budget cut are listed on the following page. You will be provided with a description of each of those organizations.

Tufts Community Union (TCU), the student governing body, is investigating how the student body believes these funding cuts should be allocated among those organizations. The TCU has commissioned researchers on campus to aid them in determining how the student population wishes the university to allocate the funding cuts. The TCU has given us the form on the next page to be completed by participants in our studies.

Each organization has reported that the 2013-2014 budgets were sufficient in funding their needs. However, each has expressed serious concerns that a 20% decrease will severely curtail their programs and possibly threaten their ability to continue operations.

Your task is to allocate budget cuts so that across the five organizations, the overall student organization budget is reduced by 20% (\$24,000). Allocate budget cuts to the organizations as you see fit. We understand that your budget cuts may not add up to exactly \$24,000. However, please try to match an overall budget cut of \$24,000 as closely as you can. After you complete your budget cut allocations, you will be asked to give your perceptions of how other students might respond.

Keep in mind that your opinions are important. Tufts University will use student allocations to make recommendations to TCU, who will represent the student body in the final allocation decisions.

Proposed Budget Cuts Student Organizations Information

Hillel Foundation for Jewish Campus Life

Hillel seeks to create a community for students to explore issues important in their lives while also improving the world around them. Hillel provides guidance and opportunities to help Jewish students learn about their Judaism and discover what it means to be Jewish in the 21st century. The destination of their Jewish journey is up to the student — Hillel provides the resources. Hillel helps students explore Jewish identity by offering opportunities to volunteer for Jewish communities, attend Taglit-Birthright trips to Israel, and engage with different cultures to expand their knowledge of their own identity. The goals of Hillel are to connect Jewish students with Jewish customs, with one another, and with the community.

Appendix D (Continued)

Tufts Safe Ride

Tufts GoSafe serves the needs of the University community by providing a free, safe ride for students and staff when traveling alone on campus at night. The service is offered every night from sunset to sunrise. Students are either driven to their destination in a van or escorted by officers on foot. Tufts GoSafe is offered on campus, into neighborhoods within the GoSafe service area, and into Davis Square when the campus shuttle is not operating. In addition to giving free rides to Tufts University students, staff, and their guests, Safe Ride provides an official and friendly presence on the streets at night.

Muslim Student Association (MSA)

The MSA is a national network of student-led groups aiming to help individuals and groups understand the religion of Islam while promoting cultural diversity and tolerance. The group offers a welcoming environment to learn about Islam through weekly discussions, community iftars during the month of Ramadan, and inviting prominent speakers to campus. The MSA also contributes to the general community by working with other student organizations. The MSA's mission is to strengthen the fraternal bonds among its members, and promote friendly relations between Muslim and non-Muslim students.

Tufts University Model United Nations

Tufts University Model United Nations consists of a group of students dedicated to international debate and diplomacy. By simulating the different bodies of the United Nations organization, students learn the dynamics of international politics and the true workings of our global system in order to attempt to enact real change while improving their public speaking, negotiation, and research skills. Like many collegiate model UN organizations, we travel to four model UN conferences in two countries every year, but we are unique in our mission: to allow all undergraduates of Tufts University the opportunity to learn about the bodies, functions, and methods of the UN and other organizations through competitions.

Women's Center

Tufts University's Women's Center aims to increase students' understanding of women and gender-related issues. The Women's Center provides resources, information, and programming to all members of the Tufts University community about women, men and gender. The Women's Center Student Collaborative, SAGE (Students Acting for Gender Equality) educates students on gender issues and helps them develop the skills necessary to advocate for gender equity in their adult lives. We work to enrich our communities through educational programming and by nurturing holistic individual growth through events, and consciousness-raising engagement.

Appendix D (Continued)

Student Perceptions Questionnaire

To what extent do you think *others in the immediate context (those who are joining you in this session)* would approve of cutting funds for each of the organizations listed below? *For each of the five organizations, please respond on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disapprove) to 7 (strongly approve).*

Hillel Foundation for Jewish Campus Life
Safe Ride
Muslim Student Association
Tufts University Model United Nations
Women's Resource Center

To what extent do you think *the student population in general* would approve cutting funds for each of the organizations listed below? *For each of the five organizations, please respond on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disapprove) to 7 (strongly approve).*

Hillel Foundation for Jewish Campus Life
Safe Ride
Muslim Student Association
Tufts University Model United Nations
Women's Resource Center

Appendix E

Deprecating Jokes and Neutral Jokes used in Experiments 2 and 3

Deprecating:

- 1) Q: What do you call a Muslim Elvis Impersonator? A: Amal Shookup
- 2) Q: What do you call an evil Muslim? A: Mu-Ha-Ha-Ha-Med

Neutral

- 1) Q: What's the difference between a well-dressed man on a bike and a poorly dressed man on a unicycle? A: Attire
- 2) Q: How do you think the unthinkable? A: With an itheberg.

Appendix F

Script for Audio Interview in Experiment 2

Description: A “Getting to Know You” session for an upcoming psychology course

Characters: Interviewer (TBD), Interviewee (Student in course)

Interviewer: Hello, and thank you for participating in this “getting to know you” exercise! This exercise is designed to help the professor of your upcoming seminar allow students to become acquainted with each other for class activities. The exercise is simple and will take roughly five minutes to complete. I just need to confirm that you consent to participate before continuing. Do you consent?

Student: I consent!

Interviewer: Okay, great! We’ll start off with some basic demographic questions. And just to let you know, you are absolutely free to say “I’d rather not say” to any of these answers and we’ll just move on to the next question. Sound good?

Student: Sounds good!

Interviewer: Okay, first, what is your name?

Student: My name is Ahmad Hassan / My name is Aaron Hayward

Interviewer: Can you spell that for me?

Student: (Condition 1) It’s A-H-M-A-D H-A-S-S-A-N / (Condition 2) A-A-R-O-N H-A-Y-W-A-R-D

Interviewer: (writing) Thanks. What is your sex?

Student: Male

Interviewer: Your hometown?

Student: Boston, Massachusetts

Interviewer: How old are you?

Student: I’m 20 years old.

Interviewer: Current Occupation?

Student: I’m a student at Tufts University

Interviewer: What year are you in school?

Appendix F (Continued)

Student: I'm a sophomore

Interviewer: And what is your major?

Student: Psychology

Interviewer: Are you employed somewhere other than Tufts University?

Student: No I'm not.

Interviewer: Okay. Next question: In general, how would you describe your political views?

Student: I would say I'm a moderate on most issues.

Interviewer: Great! What is your religious affiliation?

Student: (Condition 1): I'm a Muslim, (Condition 2): I'm a Christian

Interviewer: Okay, that's it for the demographic questions. This next part of the survey consists of a series of questions that in part will help determine who you will be paired with for projects during the semester. Again, you should feel free to say "I don't know" or "I'd rather not say" to any of these. Sound good?

Student: Sounds good!

Interviewer: Okay! Can you give us a brief description of yourself in a few of sentences?

Student: Okay... My name is Ahmad Hassan/Aaron Hayward! I'm a pretty regular guy. I'm a psychology major at Tufts University. I've been here for two years and I love this school. I'm close with my family and friends and I love food.

Interviewer: Great! How do you spend your free time?

Student: Well, I like being outdoors – hiking, kayaking, or really just spending time in a park sounds good to me any time. I've been really into rock climbing lately.

Interviewer: Cool. Can you tell us a joke you might use as an icebreaker with the other students in the class?

Student: Um... (think for a few seconds). Okay! *Joke Content* (Condition 1 – Muslim-deprecating joke, Condition 2 – neutral joke)

Interviewer: Okay. Next question. Do you have any siblings?

Student: Nope! I'm an only child.

Interviewer: Okay. So why are you taking this class this semester?

Appendix F (Continued)

Student: Hmm. Well, I wanted to take this class because I think it will help me with my career goals and it's a required course for the psych major here. I also wanted to get a broader

understanding of how experimentation in psychology works, so I think this class will help with that too.

Interviewer: What are your career goals?

Student: Um... (thinking) I don't know right now! My immediate goal is to graduate.

Interviewer: Okay fantastic. That's the end of the interview! Thank you so much for participating.

Student: No problem. Thanks!

Appendix G

The Islamophobia Scale (Lee, Gibbons, Thompson, & Timani, 2009) used in
Experiments 2 and 3

Instructions: Using the scale below, please select the number that best describes to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following items. There is no right or wrong answer. Please do not leave any item blank.

Scoring: 5-point scale – Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree

1. _____ I would support any policy that would stop the building of new mosques (Muslim place of worship) in the U.S.
2. _____ If possible, I would avoid going to places where Muslims would be.
3. _____ I would become extremely uncomfortable speaking with a Muslim.
4. _____ Just to be safe, it is important to stay away from places where Muslims could be.
5. _____ I dread the thought of having a professor that is Muslim.
6. _____ If I could, I would avoid contact with Muslims.
7. _____ If I could, I would live in a place where there were no Muslims.
8. _____ Muslims should not be allowed to work in places where many Americans gather such as airports.
9. _____ Islam is a dangerous religion.
10. _____ The religion of Islam supports acts of violence.
11. _____ Islam supports terrorist acts.
12. _____ Islam is anti-American.
13. _____ Islam is an evil religion.
14. _____ Islam is a religion of hate.
15. _____ I believe that Muslims support the killings of all non-Muslims.
16. _____ Muslims want to take over the world.

Two subscales: (1) The Affective-Behavioral subscale = Items 1 to 8, and (2) The Cognitive subscale = Items 9 to 16.

Appendix H

Script for Audio Interview used in Experiment 3

Description: A “Getting to Know You” session for an upcoming psychology course

Characters: Interviewer (TBD), Interviewee (Student in course)

Interviewer: Hello, and thank you for participating in this “getting to know you” exercise! This exercise is designed to help the professor of your upcoming seminar allow students to become acquainted with each other for class activities. The exercise is simple and will take roughly five minutes to complete. I just need to confirm that you consent to participate before continuing. Do you consent?

Student: I consent!

Interviewer: Okay, great! We’ll start off with some basic demographic questions. And just to let you know, you are absolutely free to say “I’d rather not say” to any of these answers and we’ll just move on to the next question. Sound good?

Student: Sounds good!

Interviewer: Okay, first, what is your name?

Student: (*Condition 1/2*) Ahmad Hassan / (*Condition 3/4*) Aaron Hayward

Interviewer: Can you spell that for me?

Student: (*Condition 1/2*) Yeah it’s A-H-M-A-D H-A-S-S-A-N / (*Condition 3/4*) A-A-R-O-N H-A-Y-W-A-R-D

Interviewer: (*writing*) Thanks. What is your sex?

Student: Male

Interviewer: Your hometown?

Student: Boston, Massachusetts

Interviewer: How old are you?

Student: I’m 20 years old.

Interviewer: Current Occupation?

Student: I’m a student at Tufts University

Interviewer: What year are you in school?

Student: I’m a sophomore

Appendix H (Continued)

Interviewer: And what is your major?

Student: Psychology

Interviewer: Are you employed somewhere at Tufts University?

Student: No I'm not.

Interviewer: Are you employed somewhere other than Tufts University?

Student: (*Chuckles*) No, not right now.

Interviewer: Okay. Next question: In general, how would you describe your political views?

Student: I would say I'm a moderate on most issues probably.

Interviewer: Okay! What is your religious affiliation?

Student: (*Condition 1/2*): I'm a Muslim, (*Condition 3/4*): I'm a Christian

Interviewer: Okay. What is your relationship status?

Student: I have a girlfriend.

Interviewer: How long?

Student: We've actually been dating for about four years now!

Interviewer (*sounds off-script*): Wow, that's a long time! What's she like?

Student: She's great. She's kind and supportive and we get along really well.

Interviewer: Do you two have a lot in common?

Student: Yeah. **Chuckle** It's kind of hard to not to have things in common after four years! We both love Netflix. We're watching Black Mirror right now.

Interviewer: Ooh how is it?

Student: It's really good! Also, she's a (*Condition 1/3*) Muslim/(*Condition 2/4*) Christian, and (*Only in incongruent conditions; e.g., Muslim target/Christian girlfriend*: believe it or not) we share a lot of the same values, so that's cool.

Interviewer: Sounds fun, I'll have to watch that show! (*writing*) Okay, that's it for the demographic questions. This next part of the survey consists of a series of questions that in part will help determine who you will be paired with for projects during the semester. Again, you should feel free to say "I don't know" or "I'd rather not say" to any of these. Sound good?

Student: Sounds good!

Appendix H (Continued)

Interviewer: Okay! Can you give us a brief description of yourself in a few of sentences?

Student: Okay... My name is *Ahmad Hassan/Aaron Hayward!* I'm a pretty normal person. I'm a psychology major here at Tufts. I've been here for two years and I love it. What else... I'm close with my family and friends and I love food.

Interviewer: Great! How do you spend your free time?

Student: Well, I like being outdoors – hiking, kayaking, or really just hanging out in a park sounds good to me. I've been really into rock climbing lately.

Interviewer: Cool. (*writing for a minute*) Okay. Can you tell us a joke you might use as an icebreaker with the other students in the class?

Student: Um... (*think for a few seconds*). Okay! *Joke Content (Condition 1a, 2a, 3a, 4a – Muslim-deprecatng joke, Condition 1b, 2b, 3b, 4b – neutral joke)*

Interviewer: Okay. Next question. Do you have any siblings?

Student: Nope, I'm an only child.

Interviewer: Okay. So why are you taking this class this semester?

Student: Hmm. Well, I wanted to take this class because I think it will help me with my career goals and it's also a required course for the psych major here. I also wanted to get a broader understanding of how experimentation in psychology works, so I think this class will help with that too.

Interviewer: What are your career goals?

Student: Um... (*thinking*) I'm not really sure right now! My immediate goal is to graduate I guess.

Interviewer: Okay fantastic (*writing*). That's the end of the interview! Thank you so much for participating.

Student: No problem. Thanks!

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