Jokes are No Laughing Matter: Disparagement Humor and Social Identity Theory

by

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Abstract

Disparagement humor is "remarks that elicit amusement through the denigration, derogation, or belittlement of a given target" (Ferguson & Ford, p. 283, 2008). This paper looks at disparagement humor through social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985) to explore how humor can be used to regain group membership after experiencing a prototypicality threat. Participants experienced a threat relating to masculinity, or experienced a threat relating to their University of Kansas student identity, or experienced a masculine social identity affirmation. Results indicate that a threat to any valued social identity can increase outgroup derogation; but the derogation target need not be related to the specific threatened social identity. Instead, participants used the immediate social group to determine appropriate targets of disparagement humor based on perceived social norms. After a threat to social identity, people derogate an outgroup that is relevant to the immediate ingroup, guided by perceived social norms about what is appropriate, to notify fellow ingroup members that they are different than the outgroup.

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"What did the second ugliest girl in the world say to the ugliest girl in the world?
What cadet squadron are you in?"

"What's the difference between a gorilla and a female cadet?
A gorilla can do a pull-up."

"To Honor. To Getting honor, to keeping honor, and if you can't come in her, come honor."

The jokes listed above are only three among many jokes that can be heard targeting women at the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA). Cadets spend four, long grueling years at the academy, graduate and receive a commission as an Air Force Officer. Cadets engage in a rigorous academic curriculum, which includes many lessons on how to become an officer of character, integrity, and servitude. However counterintuitive to the lessons, many male cadets spend a considerable amount of time putting down women and homosexuals, which does not exactly live up to the ideals of an officer of honor.

Why do male cadets insist on making these jokes? What are some of the reasons as to why they choose to make jokes about women and homosexuals? Exactly what purpose does it serve? These issues need to be addressed in a larger context because it is not likely a phenomenon that exists only at one of the US Service Academies. In fact, it would be difficult to find evidence of any low status group that evades being targeted through off-colored humor within social groups and institutions.

Off-colored or disparagement humor is defined as "remarks that (are intended to) elicit amusement through the denigration, derogation, or belittlement of a given target (e.g., individuals, social groups, political ideologies, material possessions)" (Ferguson & Ford, p. 283, 2008). Among the myriad jokes out in the world today, a considerable amount of those fall into this category. These jokes have been argued to serve several different functions, including

validating negative stereotypes (Gilbert, Krull, & Malone, 1990). Maio, Olson and Bush (1997) found that simply verbalizing disparaging humor and jokes reinforces negative stereotypes of groups. It can reasonably be deduced that another function of humor is to give individuals in social settings a way to gain acceptance into the new social group. From everyday life, we can see that humor appears to be a tried and true avenue for making new acquaintances into friends.

Group Norms

Every cultural group develops and maintains its own norms. Norms are the sometimes spoken but mainly unspoken rules for accepted and expected behavior from ingroup members (Myers, 2007). In accordance with social identity theory (SIT), once individuals become associated or identified with a certain social group, the specific social norms of that group begin to influence that individual's behaviors (Turner, 1991). Group norms convey central aspects of an individual's social identity, which means group members are highly motivated to conform to them. The effects of group norms on those who are highly identified with a social group are seen in college-aged binge drinking (Johnston & White, 2003), sorority members' binge-eating behaviors (Crandall, 1988), and childhood bullying (Ojala & Nesdale, 2004; Duffy & Nesdale, 2009). Group norms give a framework for an individual's decision-making as well as a guide for behaviors in many different circumstances that the person will encounter daily.

For example, Izzy Kalman (2010), the psychologist behind the Bullies to Buddies campaign, states that humor can be used as a form of bullying violence. With childhood bullying, group norms dictate how a child will perceive and participate in bullying behavior, including the element of humor (Duffy & Nesdale, 2009). Children belonging to groups with a norm for bullying were found to display more bullying behaviors than those who belonged to groups with an anti-bullying norm. Also, with friend circles that maintained a pro-bullying attitudes and

behavior, bullying behaviors increased as the prototypicality of the group member increased (Duffy & Nesdale, 2009). Prototypicality will be explored further in depth later in this paper. As shown in these studies, humor played a role in the formation of group norms that allowed and encouraged bullying behavior.

Prejudiced Norm Theory

Ford and Ferguson (2004) suggest a prejudiced norm theory approach to disparagement humor. The theory stipulates that social-psychological processes affect tolerance norms of off-colored humor. For those high in prejudice, joke telling may serve to switch communication from a serious to a non-serious conversation tone. This non-serious tone serves as a source of self-regulation. When prejudice is expressed as a joke, the joke-teller is given an opportunity to gauge the joke-recipient's level of prejudice based on their response and determine if they share the same prejudices. Because of the non-serious tone, the joke teller and the joke recipient are more likely to correctly perceive if they have shared norms of prejudice tolerance in the immediate context.

At this point, the recipient of the joke tactfully consents to this norm, verifying that the joke-teller's perception of the norm is correct. Ford and Ferguson (2004, p. 91) elaborate by stating that "the norms in a given context ... dictate appropriate reactions to discrimination against members of the disparaged group." This model serves as a perspective on group norms as a form of self-regulation. Self-regulation is important in relation to humor because it allows the joke-teller to determine if his or her prejudices are shared among the group. If his or her prejudices are not shared, the individual will use self-regulation by not discussing prejudices so that they may maintain membership to the immediate ingroup. However, if their prejudices are

shared, via confirmation of the humor used, they are likely to place a higher value of that ingroup on their identity.

Justification Suppression Model

The prejudiced norm theory resonates with the justification-suppression model of prejudice (Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002). The authors argue that social norms prohibit people from expressing their genuine prejudices and seek out justifications to express discrimination in socially normative ways. Because of the non-serious nature of humor, jokes are meant to be interpreted as "Oh, I didn't mean it! It was only a joke" and can be easily brushed off. According to Ford and Ferguson, "the unique quality of disparagement through humor is that it undermines the seriousness of the expression of prejudice. Disparagement humor seems innocuous or harmless" (2004, p. 84). While the JSM offers one account of the purpose of disparagement humor, off-colored humor can be explained from many other perspectives. The JSM offers a perspective that looks to group norms to explain why people allow the expression of certain prejudices through disparagement humor against low-status groups, like terrorists or racists. However, it does not explain what happens at the individual level in terms of whether or not the act of joke-telling is defensive (defending the honor of one's ingroup) or rectifying (reestablishing dominance over an outgroup) in some manner. Basically, what purpose does the expression of prejudice serve?

In terms of prejudice, people look to their social context to see if they are acting suitably and expressing the right sort of prejudice (e.g Crandall et al., 2002). If they are exhibiting the appropriate behaviors and attitudes, their group membership can be affirmed from the positive reaction from other group members. From this social comparison process, people in groups have a tendency to stop comparing themselves with outgroup members once they are accepted as full

members of the group simply because they are too dissimilar from themselves (Festinger, 1954).

People need others who are similar to them in order to determine if they are behaving

appropriately. These acceptable behaviors based on group membership creates dissimilarity or

differences between groups. From these intergroup differences emerges competition which

further leads to one social group deeming themselves superior to another group.

Social Identity Theory

People learn this process of comparing themselves to subordinate groups from an early

age through socialization about inter-group attitudes (Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1994). A social

identity forms from these comparisons. The idea of social identity, mainly from the initial

contribution of Tajfel and Turner in the 1970s, focuses on the individual-group relationship and

group processes. Basically, a person does just have one 'self'; instead, they have several selves,

or identities, that correspond to different social groups. Therefore, a person is made up of several

different social identities that are more salient depending on the situation.

From Turner, we can grasp the basic ideas of social identity theory (SIT) are that "(a)

shared social identity is the precondition of mutual influence, (b) disagreement within the

ingroup creates uncertainty, which must be resolved... and (c) one's own judgment or behaviour

is subjectively validated to the degree that it participates and exemplifies an ingroup norm"

(Bransombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999, p. 16). As people become an identifiable

member of a group, they will tend to place high emphasis on that specific identity in order to

resemble the other group members enough to maintain membership. This leads to the idea of

social identity as "those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social

categories to which he perceives himself as belonging" (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, p.16). Through

downward social comparison, people are easily able to discern themselves from the outgroups by

pointing out the traits and qualities that the outgroup does not have. This helps maintain a positive self-image in terms of their social group.

Tajfel and Turner (1986) make three assumptions about social identity. First, when individuals identify with a group, they want to maintain a positive self-image through that social group. Second, a positive self-image is based on comparisons with the outgroup. The ingroup must be seen as somehow distinctive, positively, from the outgroup, whomever that outgroup is. And last, if the difference between the ingroup and outgroup is negative, individuals will either find a new ingroup to identify with that is positively distinct from the outgroup or the individual will find a way to make their current ingroup look more favorably when compared to the outgroup. While many fight to maintain their positive social identity within the group, it sometimes proves to be difficult. Every day, our environment gives information that either confirms or disconfirms our membership status within a group. According to Festinger (1954), when people hear or learn that they do not fully belong to their desired group or are made to feel inferior, most people want and will attempt to regain the group membership status.

This "return" can be accomplished in a multitude of ways. People may engage in aggressive behavior to protect one's group membership and further, that group's dominance over other groups (Festinger, 1954). Aggressive behaviors can include many actions including, verbal attacks, denying certain groups rights and privileges, and even violence. According to Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (1999), belittling a relevant outgroup publicly could be a gesture of admiration for the desired ingroup and could be an attempt to improve one's status with the ingroup. People in social groups are not violent inherently, but rather individuals learn appropriate ways to act within a group via group norms. And sometimes those group norms include aggressive, derogative behaviors towards relative outgroups.

Threat to Social Identity.

An individual can associate with many social identities; however, that same individual can experience different types of social identity threat from the many identities to which they ascribe. Social identity threat is the notion that a particular social identity may be at risk of being devalued in a specific context (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). Some of these can manifest in forms of temporary threat or even as chronic threats to their personal identity. A person will respond in a multitude of ways depending on the form in which the threat is presented. Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (1999) offer a clear taxonomy of four discrete classes of social identity threat. These four types are: "'Categorization threat' – being categorized against one's will, 'distinctiveness threat' – group distinctiveness is prevented or undermined, 'threats to the value of social identity' – the group's value is undermined, and 'acceptance threat' – one's position within the group is undermined" (Branscombe et al, 1999, p. 36). This paper and research will focus on acceptance threat.

Social identity acceptance threat derives from the unwillingness of the ingroup to truly accept an individual as part of the desired ingroup. Acceptance threat can manifest from the uncertainty of group acceptance into a new group or from being excluded from an existing group (Branscombe et al., 1999). Those experiencing acceptance threat may be referred to as marginal group members or peripheral group members. Consequently, peripheral group members "are likely to devalue [a] lesser group as a means of convincing themselves, as well as other outgroup members, that they really are members of the more desirable ingroup" (Branscombe et al., 1999, p. 51).

Peripheral, or marginal, group members are people who are uncertain about the extent to which they are seen as legitimate group members by other ingroup members. They are unsure to

what degree they display the desired prototypical behaviors of actual members of the desired ingroup. Marginal group members wish to appear as similar as possible to the members of the ingroup. Highly identified marginal group members who were once full-fledged members, (i.e., those experiencing threat to an already established group membership), will try to protect the integrity of the ingroup by favoring the more prototypical group members over the non-prototypical group members. Persons experiencing acceptance threat who are highly identified desperately want to rejoin the group and will change their behaviors in order to achieve the label as a true group member once again (Branscombe et al., 1999). Peripheral group members are not satisfied with their current status and will use many methods to regain full group membership status.

Threats in an Intra-Group Context as Prototypicality Threat.

A component that is essential to SIT is prototypicality or intra-group position. According to SIT, the more a person differs from outgroup members and the less he or she differs from ingroup members, the more prototypical is that person (Turner, 1991). Tajfel (1978) asserts that when people are confronting doubt about acceptance into a desirable ingroup, they might try to present themselves to others as holding particularly favorable and prototypical attitudes toward the ingroup and negative attitudes toward the outgroup. That is to say, those on the periphery of a group may try to become more prototypical by favoring the ingroup and derogating the outgroup.

According to self-categorization theory, highly identified members of a group judge their 'self' by using the same standards used to judge other ingroup members (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001). These standards stem from what the individual thinks a prototypical member of the group looks and acts like. However, "any event, interaction, or outcome that suggests that one is not prototypical of a salient ingroup category will be threatening for an individual" (Schmitt &

Branscombe, 2001, p. 511). In other words, a person may be told that are not able to live up to the standards of a prototypical group member. To deal with this stress or anxiety, highly identified group members show an increased motivation to express their loyalty to the group and to support the group's identity. Noel, Wann, and Branscombe (1995) found that persons with peripheral group membership express negative judgments about a relevant outgroup when an ingroup audience is expected but are significantly less negative under private conditions. These participants conveyed their loyalty to the ingroup by derogating the outgroup, even when their personal attitudes were less extreme.

Group members who do not internalize their group membership into their sense of self are classified as low-identifiers. In opposition to high-identifiers, low-identifiers are not likely to be influenced by prototypicality feedback. By virtue of having a low level of identification to a group, the feedback about their prototypicality will be seen as irrelevant to them as the category in question is seen as irrelevant to them (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001). SIT predicts that low identifiers will be less negatively affected by feedback that threatens their prototypicality as opposed to high identifiers.

While Schmitt and Branscombe's (2001) work centers on how prototypicality feedback affects individuals' ratings of ingroup targets, the authors suggest that their findings could easily be extended to judgments to people in the outgroup. They propose that "when non-prototypicality feedback motivates highly identified group members to be increasingly group supportive, they should prefer others who help to maintain the distinction between their own group and relevant outgroups" (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001, p. 516). Schmitt and Branscombe argue that when individuals are told they did not live up to the expectations of the group, they are likely to derogate relevant outgroups in order to prove to other group members that they do

actually belong in the group. This is evident with sports teams fans; for example, when challenged about one's loyalty to the Kansas City Chiefs, one might answer with, "Of course I'm a true Chiefs fan. I hate the Raiders."

The role of ingroup identification is key when it comes to a person conforming to group norms. Under perceived group identity threat, highly identified Swiss participants conformed to discriminatory behaviors when it was the norm (Falomir-Pichastor, Gabarrot, & Mugny, 2009). However, the participants also conformed to anti-discrimination behaviors when anti-discrimination behaviors were presented as the group standard. In other words, highly identified members of a group selectively follow the norms of the group that align with their own personal motivations and goals. These results were not replicated with the participants with a low-level of identification to the Swiss social identity. In this situation, the Swiss participants had a high desire to be defined as a Swiss and ascribed to whatever behavior they thought would validate their status within the group.

Outgroup Derogation Under Social Identity Threat.

Individuals strive to maintain a positive social identity. Once a valued social identity is threatened, the assumption is that the individual will make an attempt to regain the loss of self-esteem suffered from the identity threat. Branscombe and Wann in their 1994 article investigate this idea. When individuals with a significant investment in a particular social identity are exposed to a social comparison that threatens the significance of that identity, it was hypothesized that the more their self-esteem is lowered, the more they would derogate the source of the threat (Branscombe & Wann, 1994). The authors exposed undergraduate females to a Rocky IV clip either showing Rocky (the American) or the Russian winning. When the participants' experienced low self-esteem levels and when the Russian won, the participants

derogated Russians more (Branscombe & Wann, 1994). These defensive processes (derogating the Russians) are a result of social identity threat. While participants in this study did not use humor to derogate the Russians, jokes can offer another method of delivering derogative messages about a certain outgroup.

A study performed by Ruttenberg, Zea, and Sigelman (1996) looked at collective identity and intergroup prejudice among Jewish- and Arab-American students. Arab-American students experiencing a social identity threat preferred jokes that targeted the outgroup and rated those jokes as funnier. The researchers concluded the Arab-American students rated the jokes as more humorous in order to acquire a more positive social identity.

But what happens when the threat does not come directly from an outgroup, but rather from the individual's own ingroup? If the individual is told he or she is not a prototypical member of the ingroup, will derogation of the relevant outgroup still happen? And how will that affect their use of disparagement humor?

Responses to Social Identity Threat.

Exactly how individuals and groups of individuals respond to social identity threat runs a gamut of possibilities. The reaction depends on a multitude of variables including (but not limited to) how the threat is displayed, how it is interpreted and perceived, and the availability of means to resolve the threat. Sometimes, anxiety can arise in individuals experiencing social identity threat causing decreased levels of performance. For women in male-dominated fields, such as mathematics and engineering, interacting with sexist men may result in social identity threat, via stereotype threat, which could cause a decrease in their performance in the field (Logel, Walton, Spencer, Iserman, von Hippel, & Bell, 2009). As an example, women in mathematics experience a social identity threat in relation to their identity as a mathematician

when they are simply reminded that they do not conform to a very important prototypicality norm for that group (being male). Adams, Garcia, Purdie-Vaughn, and Steele (2006) found that "women who were exposed to the suggestion of sexism reported less positive experience, performed worse on a standardized test, and rated the instructor as less competent that did women who were not exposed to [social identity threat]" (p. 612). For women in these fields, the non-prototypicality feedback is neither verbal nor experienced in an instantaneous moment. Rather, the threat is experienced via the environment when an individual is a minority and interacting with another person who holds prejudiced attitudes towards your group. The decreased work performance due to social identity threat is potentially felt across the group (or organization).

Intuitively, one might believe that identity threat will only have negative consequences for those under the threat. However, Giguere and Lalonde (2009) found a positive result with Canadian participants. The research showed that under *intergroup* threat, when the participants were told Canadians scored lower than Americans, highly identified Canadian participants displayed great effort exertion. While under *intragroup* threat, when the participant was told their score was lower than the average Canadian, low group identifiers displayed the greater effort exertion. Under social identity threat, individuals strive to make themselves better than whoever they are being compared to. In relation to disparagement humor, humor may be used in response to intragroup threats and intergroup threats. People may derogate the outgroup in order to boost their ingroup's status or they may derogate an outgroup to prove to ingroup members that deserve full group membership status.

Maass, Cadinu, Guarnieri, and Grasselli (2003) found that men under gender threat conditions were more likely to engage in sexual harassment-type behaviors in comparison to

those males in the no-threat condition. They threatened men's social identity in a multitude of ways including prototypicality threat, legitimacy threat, or distinctiveness threat. All threat conditions led male participants to send more pornographic photos to a female via email than those males in a control condition.

The research reviewed thus far suggests that social identity threat more often affects low-status groups. Even when the high status (or powerful) group experiences the threat, the low status group suffers the consequences through the high status group members' attempts to regain group membership status. At first glance, humor seems like an appropriate avenue for insecure high status group members to maintain their positive group member status. And instinctively, these high-status groups will target low-status groups in their jokes and disparaging humor. Every day, people share and discuss jokes that put down certain social groups, including racial or ethnic minorities, religious groups, and homosexuals. These disparaging jokes usually target groups that are of a lower status than the joke teller. Ferguson and Ford (2008), in their empirical review of disparagement humor theories, point to a specific need within the field of social psychology to investigate the application of social identity theory to disparagement humor research. This study seeks to do just that. Specifically, this research sought to highlight why heterosexual males so often target certain social groups, like women and homosexuals, in humor.

Hypothesis

When individuals possess a peripheral group member status, they might try to present themselves as a more prototypical group member by expressing attitudes that favor the ingroup and degrade the outgroup. Humor offers a distinctive outlet to express attitudes that favor the ingroup without the serious implications of uninhibited prejudice and discrimination towards another group. Additionally, "a comparison theory formulation suggests that humor appreciation

will be greatest for areas where a person feels threatened or insecure" (Wills, 1981, p. 264). People under threat conditions appear willing to take advantage of this situation for their own goals – to become a fully accepted member of the desired ingroup.

Noel, Wann and Branscombe research showed that "people with peripheral group member status express negative judgments about a comparison outgroup when an ingroup audience is anticipated but are significantly less negative in ratings of the outgroup under private conditions" (1995, p. 134-135). Following Noel and his colleagues' findings, this study seeks to expand that research by determining if the specific outgroup that is derogated needs to be relevant to the individual's social identity that is threatened. This research tests this idea through the use of humor. The hypothesis is that the males will choose jokes to present in a group environment will target an outgroup relevant to the threat they experienced. Under prototypicality threat, highly identified males will choose jokes targeting women and homosexuals more than any other target group. Similarly, under a KU identity threat, male participants will choose jokes that target KU outgroups, Kansas State University (KSU) or University of Missouri students (Mizzou), more than other joke type. Under any threat condition, participants will choose jokes that target relevant outgroups as compared to a control condition. Under threat, jokes will be rated to more humorous and less offensive than under the control condition.

In this study, participants experienced a masculinity threat, a KU social identity threat, a masculine identity affirmation (opposite of threat), or no threat at all (control). After they received a threat (or no threat), the participants read a list of jokes and rated each joke on its level of humor and offensiveness. Lastly, they chose their top three jokes to share with the group.

Method

Joke Pre-Testing

A pre-test determined if the jokes (to be used in the study) had the same level of humor. All of the jokes fell into a limited range of 'funniness' (average 2.08 on a 5 point scale). As expected, the women and gay jokes were rated significantly more offensive compared to the average joke (t(25)=3.492, p =.002 and t(25)=3.339, p =.001, respectively). Also, the KU outgroup jokes were rated significantly lower on offensiveness than the average joke (t(25)=3.442, p =.002). Three irrelevant jokes were eliminated, leaving a set of 25 jokes. Jokes labeled irrelevant in this study refer to jokes that have no social group target. An example of an irrelevant joke is "*Q: What has four legs, is big, green, fuzzy, and if it fell out of a tree would kill you? A: A pool table.*" Three irrelevant jokes were removed in order to balance the proportion of each type of joke across the whole study. The significant differences in level of offensiveness were not a concern because offensiveness did not correlate with the level of humor ratings. While none of the humor ratings were significantly different by condition, the irrelevant jokes and KU outgroup jokes were rated slightly funnier (irrelevant jokes t(25)=.47, p =.642 and KU outgroup jokes t(25)=.601, p =.553) than the women and homosexual men jokes (women t(25)=.63, p =.534 and gay t(25)=.746, p =.463). Results from the pre-testing data are included in Appendix A.

Experimental Design

The study used a 4 (threat type: masculinity threat, KU identity threat, masculinity affirmation, and no threat control conditions) X 4 (joke target: women, homosexuals, KU outgroups (K-State or Mizzou), and irrelevant joke targets) mixed-model factorial design.

Similarly to the pre-test, irrelevant jokes refer to jokes that do not target any specific social group.

Participants

Participants were 135 males recruited through the General Psychology subject pool. Ages ranged from 18 to 27 years ($M = 19.01$, $SD = 1.05$). Eighty-two percent of participants identified as white, 6.7% as Asian, 5.2% as black, 3% as Latino, .7% as an International student, and 2.2% as other.

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four threat conditions. All conditions were in separate feedback envelopes that were individually stuffed, sealed and shuffled. The experimenter typed the names on address labels when participants signed up for the study. Envelopes were drawn at random and names were attached to the outside of the feedback envelope only.

Two male undergraduate research assistants (RA) ran the study in groups of 3-10 participants. As participants entered the lab, they were told that it was very important that they not speak or communicate with one another until instructed to do so. The entire study was presented to participants in three parts; Packet A, Packet B, and Packet C. The RA placed Packet A on each of the desks indicating that each participant should sit where a packet was available. Packet A included a consent form, a demographics form, a pre-manipulation mood questionnaire and a gender group identification questionnaire that they were instructed to fill our right away. The pre-manipulation mood scale asked participants to respond to five questions about their mood on the Brief Mood Introspection Scale, which is a -10 to 10 Likert-type scale (O'Brien, 1997). The other measure was the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (CSE), which measures the self-

evaluation of one's social identity (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). The CSE in this study was only specific to the participants' level of identification to their gender. Therefore, this study used the CSE scale as a measure of gender identification. Additionally, this study only included two of the four subscales of the CSE, the private collective self-esteem subscale and the importance to identity subscale. These two subscales were used, instead of the full four subscales, in order to best measure the participants' level of private identification to the group. See Appendix A for the complete testing materials.

Next, the experimenter handed out feedback in an envelope (Packet B) from a "KU Personality Assessment" that was a composite score that consisted of ratings on certain personality dimensions. He explained that this was another research study by a different experimenter and that the "real study about jokes" would begin soon. They were told that this feedback form was created in order to help the University of Kansas understand their student population better. Also, they were told that the scores took into consideration an application questionnaire they filled out before school started, high school activities, high school GPA and ACT scores. At this point, the experiment resembles Schmitt and Branscombe (2001), by introducing a threat to the participants' male prototypicality.

Packet B included a cover letter, a "KU Personality Assessment" form that contained the false feedback and threat manipulation. The cover letter explained that the university is interested in a new process that allows them to see their test scores from mass testing that took place earlier in the semester. The letter went on to explain that this is a trial basis and their feedback on the test score process was requested. The feedback the participants gave served as a manipulation check.

Each participant was given an envelope with his name on it that contained false feedback from the 'mass survey' in addition to a letter from the university's Psychology Department explaining the trial program and how to interpret the scores. The feedback was similar to a Big Five personality scale. The personality dimensions were derived from the 16 Personality Factors, measured by the 16PF Questionnaire (Cattell, 1994).

The sheet of paper showed six scales on various traits, including masculinity and 'Fit to KU,' which in one condition threatened the prototypicality of participants' identity as a KU student. Participants were told the average rating for masculinity ranges from 6.6 to 9.2 on a 10-pt scale. In the masculine 'prototypicality threat' condition, scores showed that they were below average (a score of 4.67) on masculinity. In the masculine 'prototypicality affirmation' condition, the scores showed that the participant scored high on masculinity (a score of 9.34). Participants were told the average rating for the 'Fit to KU' was between 4.5 and 5.5 on a 10-pt scale. In the 'KU threat' condition, scores showed that they scored below average (a score of 4.2) when compared to other KU students. As a manipulation check, the participants were given a questionnaire about the pre-screening process. The questionnaire asked participants to report their scores for each personality trait and if they scored below average, average, or above average compared to the average KU undergraduate student.

Next, participants took part in the main study. They were told that the researcher was interested in jokes and off-colored humor. Specifically, the participants were told that the researcher was interested in finding out their private individual opinions of jokes and comparing them to public group opinions of jokes in addition to how jokes affect mood. They were told that they would first complete the individual portion of the experiment and would later complete the second portion, which included a group discussion. They saw a list of numerous jokes that

targeted women and homosexuals (groups relevant to masculine identity) and KSU students and University of Missouri (Mizzou) students (groups relevant to the KU identity). Some jokes do not disparage any target groups (irrelevant joke targets). They were asked to rate how funny they found each joke on a scale from 1 (not funny) to 5 (very funny) and how offensive the jokes are from 1 (not offensive) to 5 (very offensive). See Appendix B for the complete joke list.

Finally, participants were told that each of them had viewed a different list of jokes and asked each person to pick their top three favorite jokes from the list to share with the other participants. Next they completed the post-manipulation mood measure. This measure was the Brief Mood Introspection Scale (BMIS; Mayer & Gaschke, 1988 with the BMIS (see Appendix).

After all of the participants had completed the questionnaires, they were fully debriefed and allowed to leave. They never actually verbalized any of the jokes to the other participant group members. They were also offered a chance to provide feedback to the researcher or experimenter through an optional feedback form. Unfortunately, one participant expressed doubt but his testing materials were not discernable among his group; therefore, his materials could not be excluded, even though he expressed doubt about the legitimacy of the feedback forms. Upon reflection, the collection feedback method was unsatisfactory and must be modified for future research.

Results

Manipulation Check

Participants in the study were asked to provide feedback on the test result process. Each participant was asked to rewrite their scores on the feedback score. Eleven cases of the entire study population (N= 135) did not correctly replicate their scores; eight cases from the control condition, one from the KU identity threat condition, one from the masculinity threat condition,

and one from the masculinity affirmation condition. The cases dropped did yield a significant Chi-square, χ^2 (3, N = 135) = 13.66, p = .003. Just to be safe, the eleven cases were excluded a priori based on the fact that these participants did not complete the manipulation check. This is likely because the false feedback was not surprising and therefore not surprising to the participants and did not grab their attention.

Gender Identification

The two CSE subscales served as a gender identification scale. Gender identification was used as a continuous variable. Gender identification was not measured by discrete definitions of high or low identification.

Dependent Variables

Humor ratings and offensiveness ratings of each joke target group serve as the dependent variables in this study. Humor and offensiveness scores were based on a 1 to 5 scale. The 'top three favorite jokes' at the end of the study were classified according to the groups they targeted. In other words, all of the women jokes were tabulated together, all of the gay men jokes were tabulated together, and the same for KU outgroups jokes and the jokes that were classified as irrelevant. For the purposes of this study, jokes targeting Kansas State University students or University of Missouri students were tabulated jointly as KU outgroups and not as independent target groups. The results below reflect a comparison of the mean number of jokes chosen for a target group across conditions. In all, 12 dependent variables were assessed.

The jokes were not weighted based on the order that they were chosen; all jokes were weighted the same regardless of order. The reason for not weighing the chosen jokes based on order is because it appeared that most participants did not choose based on preference. It seemed that once they were instructed to pick their favorite jokes, they went back through the jokes from

the beginning (or the end) and chose their favorites based on the first three they reencountered

that satisfied the needs of the task. When listed, the three jokes were frequently in a numerical or

reverse numerical order. The researcher deduced that the participants were not 'searching for

their favorites' but rather they were trying to find jokes that satisfied the requirement and picked

whichever ones came first. The participants did not seem to rank order their jokes nor were they

asked to do so.

Test Used

A series of two-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVAs) were used in this analysis. First, an

overall ANOVA was used to determine if any significant effects of condition occurred. A 4

(threat conditions: masculinity threat, KU identity threat, masculinity affirmation, and no threat

control) x 4 (target group: women, homosexuals, KU outgroups [K-State or Mizzou], and

irrelevant joke targets) factorial ANOVA was run on both humor and offensiveness ratings, as

well as the number of jokes chosen, with repeated measures on target groups. Gender

identification was run as a covariate with the condition as the between-subjects variable in an

ANCOVA.

Table 2 indicates the mean humor rating and *p*-values for the jokes by condition and joke

type. Figure 1 offers a graphical representation of the mean ratings. Table 3 shows the mean

offensiveness rating and *p*-values of the jokes by condition and joke type; Figure 2 offers a

graphical representation of the means. Table 4 denotes the mean number of jokes and *p*-values

chosen based on the participants' conditions. Figure 3 offers a graphical representation of the

mean number of jokes chosen. Table 5 and 6 offer results from further ANOVAs that group

conditions on the type of treatment the participants received; see Tables 6 and 7 for further

explanation. Table 8 presents the correlations between the dependent variables and gender identification.

General Linear Model Results.

A 4 (threat condition: masculine threat, KU threat, masculine affirm, no threat control) X 2 (gender identification) X 4 (joke target group: women, homosexuals, KU outgroups, irrelevant) ANOVA was conducted on humor ratings, with repeated measures on joke target group. The pattern of means is in Table 2 and graphically represented in Figure 1. There was no effect of threat condition on humor, $F(3, 107) = .09$, $p = .96$. The ANCOVA showed that there was no effect of gender identification on humor, $F(3, 109) = .153$, $p = .928$. There was a significant effect of joke target group on humor, $F(3, 120) = 63.38$, $p < .0005$. Jokes targeting women were rated more humorous ($M = 2.92$, $SD = .85$) compared to all other jokes (irrelevant jokes M = 2.07, SD = .65, gay jokes $M = 2.42$, $SD = .72$, KU Outgroups M=2.37, SD = .68) but not to a significant degree, F(3, 120) = .88, $p = .45$. There was one significant interaction between humor and condition, F(9, 120) = 1.88, $p = .05$. Therefore, the condition and the joke target simultaneously affected humor ratings. There were no other significant three-way interactions, all F's <1, shown in Table 2. The humor ratings of KU outgroup jokes did not significantly change across conditions. According to post hoc testing (Tukey), the biggest different between humor ratings of the KU outgroup jokes occurs when comparing the participants in the control condition and the KU identity threat condition, but were still not significant. The conditions did not significantly affect humor ratings for irrelevant jokes, women jokes, and gay jokes.

A 4 (threat condition: masculine threat, KU threat, masculine affirm, no threat control) X 2 (gender identification) X 4 (joke target group: women, homosexuals, KU outgroups, irrelevant) ANOVA was conducted on offensiveness ratings, with repeated measures on joke target group.

The pattern of means is in Table 3 and graphically represented in Figure 2. There was no effect of threat condition on offensiveness, F (3, 120) = 1.34, p = .27. The ANCOVA showed there was an effect of gender identification on offensiveness, F (3, 109) = 12.21, p <.001. There was a significant effect of joke target group on offensiveness, F (3, 360) = 186.97, p < .001. Jokes targeting women and homosexuals were rated more offensive (women M = 2.5, SD = .916, gay jokes M = 2.5, SD = .98) compared to the irrelevant and KU outgroups jokes (irrelevant jokes M = 1.37, SD = .44, KU Outgroups M=1.64, SD = .66). There was no significant interaction effect between offensiveness and condition on offensiveness ratings F(9, 360) = .86, p = .56. There were no significant three-way interactions. In general, there were no significant results in the offensiveness ratings. Neither the threat manipulation nor gender identification had any effect on participants' perceptions of the jokes' offensiveness levels.

A 4 (threat condition: masculine threat, KU threat, masculine affirm, no threat control) X 2 (gender identification) X 4 (joke target group: women, homosexuals, KU outgroups, irrelevant) ANOVA was conducted on the number of jokes chosen in each target group, with repeated measures on joke target group. The pattern of means is in Table 4 and graphically represented in Figure 3. There was no effect of threat condition on the number of jokes chosen, F (3, 119) = .620, p = .60. The ANCOVA showed there was no effect of gender identification on number of jokes chosen, F (3, 108) = .699, p = .44. There was a significant effect of joke target group on number of jokes chosen, F (3, 119) = 51.17, p < .001. Jokes targeting KU outgroups (M = 1.44, SD = .94) were chosen more often than women jokes, homosexual jokes, and irrelevant jokes, women M = .91, SD = .81, gay jokes M = .43, SD = .62, irrelevant jokes M = .22, SD = .43. There was a significant interaction effect of condition and target group on participants' joke

choices, F(9, 357) = 1.93, p = .05. There were no significant two-way or three-way interactions. Condition and gender identification had no effect on participants' joke chose.

There were significant results on the within subjects ratings on all three dependent variables. Humor ratings, offensiveness ratings, and the number of jokes chosen all yielded a value of p<.00 (See Table 2, 3, and 4 for full reporting). This result was expected as this test compared different joke targets within the same conditions. Because the jokes targeted different groups, a significance difference between the humor levels of the KU outgroup jokes and irrelevant jokes was expected. There was a significant result for the interaction between the joke category and condition on humor ratings, $F(3, 120)$ = 1.88, p = .05, and for the number of jokes chosen, $F(3,119)$ =1.93, p = .05. There were no significant 3-way interactions between joke target group, gender identification and condition.

Another two-way ANOVA showed that participants under threat conditions (KU identity threat and masculinity threat) chose significantly more jokes against KU outgroups, $F(1, 122)$ = 4.99, p = .03, than those under no threat conditions (control and masculinity affirmation). Those under the no threat conditions chose more jokes targeting women than those participants under threat conditions to a marginally significant degree, $F(1, 122)$ = 3.40, p = .07. The pattern of means and percentage of target group jokes chosen is in Table 5.

However, a comparison of the control condition and the identity manipulated conditions (KU identity threat, masculinity threat, and masculinity affirmation) is warranted. The effect of any identity manipulation (positive or negative) may be at the core of the results, not just social identity threat. The pattern of means and percentage of target group jokes chosen is in Table 6. In the identity manipulated conditions, participants chose significantly more jokes targeting KU outgroups than the control condition, $F(1, 122)$ = 6.59, p = .01. Additionally, those participants

in the control condition chose significantly more jokes targeting women than those in the identity manipulated conditions, $F (1, 122) = 5.30$, $p = .02$. Gender identification was not included in the last two analyses because it only measured identification with gender and not identification to KU (undergraduate institution identification).

Discussion

The experimental conditions did not have a great effect on the humor and offensiveness ratings of the jokes, which was inconsistent with the hypothesis. However, the manipulation had a small effect on which jokes the participants chose to share with the group. The lack of difference between private ratings jokes between the experimental conditions support Noel, Wann and Branscombe's study (1995). The humor and offensiveness scores were not shared with the group and therefore represent each participant's private ratings of the jokes.

Participants in the KU Identity Threat condition choose marginally significantly more jokes targeting KU outgroups when compared the control condition. As predicted, participants who were threatened about their KU social identity chose more jokes targeting the relevant target group (KU outgroups) in an attempt to affirm their group membership. However, the number of participants choosing jokes targeting KU outgroups was statistically the same between the KU identity threat condition and the masculine identity threat condition. Participants in the masculine identity threat condition also choose marginally significantly more KU outgroup jokes when compared to the control condition. This result contradicted the prediction.

In many ways, these results are showing that the participants are reacting similarly to the masculinity threat false feedback and the KU identity threat false feedback. Even though the threats were different, the participants reacted in the same manner when attempting to regain a positive self-image. This indicates that a threat to any valued social identity may increase

outgroup derogation and the outgroup may not necessarily be related to the specific social identity that was threatened. It can be assumed that these two threats, masculinity threat and KU identity threat, are two highly valued identities for the participant pool. These two identities were the only two social groups recruited as participants. It was required that each participant was male and a KU undergraduate. The participants may have simply been primed to think about these two identities because the room was full of male undergraduate students. The participants likely were looking directly at their future audience of their jokes (during the joke choice portion of the study) when determining which joke to share with the group. For them, KU undergraduate was the salient social identity. The salient KU identity forced participants to think about group norms that dictate behavior of a prototypical KU undergraduate.

The humor ratings for all jokes did not change significantly across all conditions. The participants in the control condition rated the jokes as having the same humor level as participants in the three experimental conditions. Additionally, there was a positive correlation between all humor ratings (see Table 8). This positive correlation, averaged to be .61, signifies participants generally believed that if one joke was funny, then the other jokes were funny; similarly, if they did not think one joke was funny, then the other jokes were not funny either. A similar correlation occurred for offensiveness and averaged out to .18.

The offensiveness ratings for all jokes did not change significantly across any of the conditions. The manipulation did not have an effect on humor ratings nor the offensiveness ratings for the jokes. Further, male participants in the masculine identity threat and the masculine identity affirmation conditions did not differ in the number of jokes targeting women they chose. In both of these conditions, the mere mention of one's masculinity, regardless of affirmation or

threat, triggered the same response. Compared to the control condition, participants were more likely to select KU outgroup jokes at the simple mention of masculinity.

There was not a significant difference between the number of jokes chosen targeting KU outgroups between the KU identity threat condition, masculinity threat condition, and the masculinity affirmation condition. However, the number jokes chosen targeting KU outgroups in the masculine identity affirmation condition had a high degree of overlapping variability with the control condition which led to the insignificant finding when compared to the control group. See Figure 3 for a graphical representation of the variability for the number of jokes targeting KU outgroups in the control condition and in the masculinity affirmation condition.

Previous research predicts that under social identity threat people will tell jokes about relevant outgroups. In this study, participants in the KU identity threat condition chose significantly fewer jokes targeting women than participants in the control condition. This indicates that under normal circumstances, when a male is not under any sort of social identity threat, he is more likely to choose a joke that targets women. However, if a male is under any type of social identity threat, he is more likely to choose a joke targeting KU outgroups. This is interesting because in the control condition, participants chose more women jokes than KU outgroup jokes. In the KU identity threat condition, participants chose more KU outgroup jokes than jokes targeting women, which is consistent with the study's hypothesis. According to the hypothesis, the masculinity threat condition results should look more similar to the control condition but the results look more like the KU identity threat condition. The interesting part lies in the mystery of why participants under the masculinity threat and affirmation still chose more jokes targeting KU outgroups instead of women.

These are puzzling results. It appears that under any type of threat, participants in this study were more likely to choose jokes targeting Mizzou or K-State students. The explanation potentially exists in the group setting of this experiment. When the participants partook in the study, they were in a room full of men. Some of those men experienced masculinity threat, some a KU identity threat, some a masculinity affirmation, and some were under no threat. After reading the false feedback, about half of the participants likely felt negative about a social identity, which lead to a lower self-esteem. However, they were soon presented with an opportunity to regain a positive social identity by picking the best three jokes to share with the group.

Noel, Wann, and Branscombe (1995) found that insecure group members derogated outgroups when their responses were expected to be shared with fellow ingroup members, but not when their responses remained private. The study presented in this paper is consistent with Noel and his colleagues' findings. Private ratings of the jokes (humor, offensiveness) did not change for the participants under the experimental conditions; however, public ratings of the jokes were affected by the experiment's manipulations. Further, Bahns and Branscombe (2011) tested the number of gay-bashing comments based on the recipient's sexual orientation (gay, straight) and the immediate social group's level of legitimate discrimination towards homosexuals. Bahns and Branscombe found no effect of the recipient's group membership on gay bashing behavior, but there is also an effect for expected agreement with the social group (via group norms that are dictated through online comments). Participants were quite aware their remarks would be more offensive to a gay man than a straight man, but more offensive comments were made when discriminatory remarks were the norm than compared to the condition where homosexual discrimination was seen as illegitimate. This suggests a different

motivation for making gay bashing comments, which indicates that norms dictate participant's behavior. The above findings are extremely compatible with this study's results. The audience that will be receiving the humor from the joke teller is important to the joke teller's choice of content. However, group norms (or the legitimacy of behaviors in the immediate environment) dictate to a greater extent the joke teller's choice of content. At some level, people acknowledge their audience before presenting information about themselves, especially when it comes to their prejudices as shown in the JSM; however, it does matter if the audience is perceived to be an ingroup or an outgroup.

This study further supported Noel, Wann and Branscombe's (1995) research by exposing the difference between private and public opinions about the jokes. In this study, humor and offensiveness ratings showed private evaluations of the jokes and the jokes the participants chose to share with the group showed their public evaluation of the joke. Across conditions, private evaluations did not change. However, under social identity threat, participants changed their public evaluation of the jokes by choosing more jokes that targeted KU outgroups.

Noel, Wann and Branscombe investigated whether or not peripheral group members were expressing bias that they personally believed, or in other words, *intra*personal identity conflict. The researchers believe that participants were expressing bias based on self-presentational intentions, not based on *intra*personal conflict. Basically, participants were found to be using derogation to create an impression on other ingroup members that the peripheral group member is different from the outgroup. In this study, participants were found to engage in similar behavior.

This study showed that for participants under any threat, KU identity or masculine identity, they chose more jokes targeting the KU outgroup. Participants under no threat (control

and masculinity affirmation) chose more jokes targeting women. This adds to the argument that people under any type of identity threat will look towards their immediate social group, make a prediction about what norms are prevalent, and then base their behavior off of these norms.

In this study, participants' ratings of the jokes humor and offensiveness did not change across conditions. The humor and offensivness ratings represent a private evaluation of the joke. The jokes chosen to share with the group embody a public evaluation of the joke. However, there was a difference in the number of jokes chosen to share with the group based on if the participant's identity had been threatened in some way. This indicates that the participants' private view of the jokes differed from their public views of the jokes. Again, this is consistent with Noel, Wann & Branscombe's (1995) study.

The male participants had four choices in this situation. They could degrade women, homosexuals, Mizzou or K-State students, or pick an irrelevant joke that disparaged no social group. The participants likely sized up their target audience that consisted of other KU, male undergrads. Each participant may have looked at his audience and only saw a group of other KU students not a group of other males. Gender may not have been salient since there were no women present. When picking their jokes, these males played it safe. As a KU student, every person in the room is expected to dislike Mizzou or K-State students; these schools are rivals of the University of Kansas. However, it is less likely that every male in the room would support humor that degrades women or homosexuals. It is even possible that some of the participants were homosexual. Participants likely picked jokes that gave them a better chance of gaining the immediate ingroup's approval by choosing jokes that targeted unambiguous outgroups of the ingroup, which are K-State and Mizzou students.

For these male participants, what exactly was driving them to choose more jokes targeting KU outgroups? Ferguson and Ford note precisely "social identity becomes salient in intergroup settings where individuals categorize themselves and others according to salient social group memberships" (2008, p. 267). The participants in this situation were in a room full of male KU undergraduates. For them, all the room members looked fairly similar. An argument can be made that which social identity (male, KU student, Kansan, etc.) becomes salient depends largely on situational demands and that a person will self-categorize based on identities that are relevant to the situation (Turner and Reynolds, 2001). For these individuals, it was far more important to fit into the immediate group in order to regain their positive self-image than trying to regain their positive self-image in relation to the specific masculinity threat. Participants regained a positive masculine self-image after receiving a masculinity threat by derogating a relevant outgroup to the *immediate ingroup*. While women and homosexuals are considered an outgroup to males, the participants perceived a salient ingroup of KU undergraduates, not male undergraduates. Potentially, a positive self-image is a combination of many social identities and when one of those identities are threatened, an individual looks to the immediate group context to bolster the whole self-image, rather than the specific self-image that was threatened.

Like mentioned above, a positive self-image is a combination of many social identities. When one social identity is threatened, the whole is damaged. Rather than fixing the specific social identity that has been damaged, individuals seek to boost their whole self-image. This could be due to the fact that when the self-image is damaged in some way, it is not always obvious or discernable as to why exactly a person's self-image has been damaged. In order to gain that positive self-image back, people will use any means possible to get it back and will use

the path of least resistance to do so. Any low-status group then becomes a likely victim of these attempts to regain a positive self-image, potentially through disparagement humor.

The purpose of this study originated from the notion that when the masculine identity is threatened, males will try to assert their group membership by derogating outgroups that are relevant to the male identity. If one is not masculine, one is feminine. Stereotypical feminine groups can be categorized as women and gay men. The concept of the serviceable other (Sampson, 1993) can help elaborate why the outgroup is important in establishing an ingroup's identity.

Sampson (1993) argues that a serviceable other is required in order to create a positive identity for the individual. He states "dominant groups create a desired identity for themselves on the basis of their ability to set the terms by which others are defined" (Sampson, p. 1227, 1993). He goes on to explain that creating a serviceable other allows the dominant group to use representation to manifest desired qualities for one's own group by constructing a contrasting other who will be serviceable to that mission. Cooley (1902), and then later Mead (1934), made the assumption that people base their self-views on the treatment they receive from others (Gomez, Seyle, Huici, & Swann, 2009). These self-views help create a predictable world for the individual. Others will treat a person in a specific way because of the norms the person adheres to. Norms guide behavior, which helps the individual shape their social identity or identities and self-perception.

Without this serviceable other, our ideal image cannot be completed. An outgroup with different norms is necessary for a positive social identity because it allows the ingroup to see what norms and behaviors are not allowed. Tajfel and Turner (1985) further elaborate by stating "the mere awareness of the presence of an outgroup is sufficient to provoke intergroup

competitive or discriminatory responses on the part of the ingroup" (p. 13). The outgroup gives the ingroup a purpose of being. Unfortunately, that purpose may simply be for the ingroup to derogate them and feel superior to them. Multiple groups that are different from us help us to understand who we are in. Knowing who or what we do not want to be allows us to know exactly what we do want to be.

While this study investigated this very idea, it also attempted to show that this phenomenon does not only happen for gender identity threat but that it could also occur with any other type of social identity threat. To find out if the theory was not just limited to masculinity, some participants were threatened under a different social identity--University of Kansas student identity.

In summary, when it comes to regaining group membership and maintaining a positive social identity, people are likely to quickly look at their *immediate* group surroundings and adhere to those group norms. Jokes that target Mizzou or K-State students were the best answer for these participants. Interesting to note, participants in all four conditions rated the women jokes slightly funnier (2.75) than the KU jokes (2.53) on the humor scale. The participants did not think the KU outgroup jokes were funnier, but they understood that the KU outgroup disparaging jokes suited their purpose and goal much better than the women disparaging jokes. Rather than choosing joke targets that are relevant to the social identity threat, participants chose jokes that were relevant to the immediate ingroup. The hypothesis is not fully supported because the goal for the participants appears to be to recover the lost positive self-image; however, the means to obtain the goal seem to be through gaining social approval in the immediate ingroup instead of derogating the group relevant to the threat.

The above rationale seemingly answers the question about why those under KU threat and masculine identity threat chose more jokes targeting Mizzou or K-State students rather than jokes targeting women. However, the results indicated that when compared to the control condition, participants in any of the identity manipulated conditions chose more jokes targeting KU groups, while those in the control condition chose more jokes targeting women. The participants who experienced a masculine identity *affirmation* also chose more jokes targeting KU outgroups, despite not having been exposed to a social identity threat at all. Those experiencing the masculine affirmation likely achieved an extremely positive social identity because they were told they were extra manly.

Under social identity theory, these participants probably sought to *maintain* their positive self-esteem using the same method as those participants who did experience a social identity threat, even though this group did not have a need to prove themselves as worthy group members. However, they still needed to maintain or preserve the perception that they are indeed manly and dominate, even if they are only seeking to preserve this image to themselves. This indicates that when a person is told that they are a good example of what it means to be masculine, extra pressure to confirm to existing social norms is created. In this case, the norm about masculinity means not disparaging disadvantaged groups, like women and homosexuals. Another rationale is that these men felt pressure into conforming to the immediate group norm relating to the group's KU identity; they felt the pressure to disparage KU outgroups.

Lessons Learned

Even though two identities were tested and manipulated, the study only measured participants' identification to their gender. This limited the available analyses that could be run. Participants' identification to their undergraduate institution could have had a major impact on

their joke choice and their ratings of humor and offensiveness. In future studies, any identity that is manipulated, participants' identification to that identity must be measured in order to fully understand the implications of the manipulation.

No significant results occurred with the gender identification scale when a three-way interaction was tested. Since this study only used two of the four subscales in the CSE, the reliability of the scale could have been compromised. Future studies that aim to capture participants' level of identification to any social group, including gender, will use the CSE in its entirety. However, another explanation concerning the CSE in this particular study is possible.

After the investigation and upon further reflection, the gender identification scale may not have necessarily been capturing the participants' social group (male) *identification*. Rather, this scale likely could have measured of the level of *security* each participant felt with his gender group. There is a difference between how important a social group is to a person and how they feel about where they are in comparison to other people in the same social group. Therefore, any mention of masculinity causes the individuals who are *less secure* in their masculinity to actively push away from the negative stereotypical bad behavior of men, i.e. derogating women and/or gay men. The experiment allowed for a unique situation; like mentioned above, all participants were male. However, all participants were also KU undergraduates. Again, when these less secure participants were forced to try and make their masculinity more secure by impressing the male group at hand, they likely chose jokes they knew would give them immediate social approval by choosing a joke target that the entire group was guaranteed to enjoy: Mizzou and Kansas State students. The participants chose the least common denominator in the room (KU outgroups) in order to feel more secure in their masculinity.

For high gender identifiers, it seems strange that they are not affected by masculinity threat or by being told they are very masculine. However, these results stem back to the idea that their gender identification scale may be investigating gender security rather than gender identification. For male participants who are highly secure in the gender, then masculinity threat or affirmation is likely to roll right off their shoulders because they are extremely confident in their masculinity; they simply are not affected by the mention of masculinity.

Limitations

One of the biggest issues facing this study is the simple fact that the jokes chosen were not very funny. On a scale from 1 to 5, the jokes averaged a score range from 2.1 to 2.9, which on the pre-testing materials was labeled 'somewhat funny.' The effectiveness of the study could have been affected by the lack of humor. As with humor and joke-telling, part of the humor depends on delivery. Hearing a spontaneous joke from a close friend who is very animated and clever in his or her delivery affects how funny you will perceive the joke. Ford, Johnson, Blevins, and Zepeda (1999) found that participants high in hostile sexism were more offended by sexist jokes told by men than told by women, or joke tellers whose sex was not revealed, suggesting that the joke audience uses the joke teller's membership to determine his or her intentions. Because of the experimental method in this study, the jokes were ambiguously delivered which can severely impact how the jokes are perceived. As a correction, the next study could employ an active delivery system where an individual (either a video or research assistant) could tell the jokes to the participants. At the same time, the additional confounds would be entered into the equation as far as how the joke teller actually tells the joke.

Another confound was the sheer amount of variables that were presented to each participant. The design of the study was a little too complicated. Twenty-five jokes may been too

much for the participants to process in such a short amount of time. In addition, the fact that twelve of the twenty-five jokes targeted Mizzou or K-State students was overlooked. Five jokes targeted women and five targeted homosexuals, while the remaining three were jokes with no clear target social group. Participants choose between 10 masculine outgroups and 12 KU outgroup jokes. Obviously, the design was lop-sided. As a result, the participants were presented with more chances to enjoy derogating KU outgroups rather than masculine outgroups. This not only affected our participants, but also how the results needed to be analyzed.

Self-Categorization Theory

Group behavior is defined by self-categorization theory (SCT) as individuals acting in terms of a collective social identity. Those specific group behaviors are dictated by group norms surrounding the social identity. A shift in self-perception occurs from personal to social identity and vice-versa. Specifically, "any categorization represents a differentiation of lower order (more particular) stimuli within a higher order, more global category" (Turner, 1988, p. 114). Further, self-perception depends on social identity and the perception of personal differences. These two things provide a basis for how an individual should act in a particular situation. Jetten, Spears, and Manstead (1997) offer some key insight: "Prototypicality is not a fixed or stable property of the individual but can vary with the comparative context, helping to explain situational variability in willingness to display ingroup bias" (p. 637). For our participants, this may be the answer to explain their behavior. For the participants in this study, they likely self-categorized based on the lowest common denominator, which happened to be the identity of a KU student.

In this threatened environment, our participants possibly could have overlooked the fact that their immediate social group was all male and focused on the ingroup of KU students. While choosing KU outgroups as their joke targets, they are not instantly rectifying their now

peripheral *male* group membership but they will most likely be wholly accepted into the *immediate* group. Turner states "self-categorizations are part of the process of relating to the social world, not things" (1988, p. 114). Turner then sums with this statement; "the self is dynamic, relational, comparative, fluid, context-specific, and variable" (Turner, 1988, p. 114). The participants seem to have simply renegotiated their multiple social identities in order to maintain a positive self-image in this specific circumstance. Clearly, balancing multiple social identities is a complex process that is extremely dynamic and demanding.

Another issue concerning this study possibly could deal with the demographics of the participants and the nature of the stereotype threat. For men, there are few overarching negative stereotypes involving their gender. As Adams and his colleagues (2006) found, sexism does not have the same effect on men as it does on women. Male participants received instruction for a logic test from a male instructor, whom was suggested to be sexist by a female confederate. Men in the sexist condition still performed as well on the logic test as men in the non-sexist condition. However, women performed worse on the logic test in the sexist condition as compared to women in the non-sexist condition. The results supported their hypothesis that the hint of a sexist environment does not have the matching detrimental consequences for men as for women.

To further support this concept, research by Schmitt, Branscombe, Kobrynowicz, and Owen (2002) hypothesized that members of a disadvantaged group would suffer psychological harm from perceiving discrimination, while members of the higher status group would not. They found that for women, perceptions of discrimination were indeed associated with negative consequences. On the other hand, perceptions of discrimination were not associated with harmful consequences for men. Quite possibly, different social groups will experience social identity threats in unique ways and the results of that threat will manifest in equally distinctive ways.

Future Research

      This study is a great place to start investigating the idea of social identity theory in relation to disparagement humor. However, it would be beneficial to better comprehend the research presented in this study by threatening different target groups; race and gender are good examples of potential groups to test. Using KU undergraduate whites (male and female) only as participants, the results could indicate that they still would choose jokes that derogate a safe outgroup (like K-State or Mizzou students) instead of other races (like African-American or Latino) when they are threatened about their racial social identity. Understanding what particular social identities are more susceptible than others would provide a solid rationale on why people choose to make disparaging jokes against other social groups.

      Changing the mode in which the participants experienced social identity threat might alter the results. For example, reading that one is not very manly can easily be overlooked. However, if there is a credible member of the ingroup (a very masculine male, like Chuck Norris) tells a person that he is not very manly, the result of the face-to-face social identity threat could potentially be more damaging and cause a greater effect. A study could be designed where participants could experience social identity threat in real-life.

      Additionally, changing the environment and cultural worldview of the experiment would be very interesting. Like the prejudice norm theory approach to disparagement humor and the JSM argue, overarching social norms dictate how the audience will receive disparaging humor. If this study were to take place in a masculine dominated environment, like the Air Force Academy or any of the US military academies, the overarching cultural environment likely would have an effect on the results. A major part of this study that is difficult to account for is the current social norms and rules of the larger surroundings. Military culture can be very different than a state

university. For example, KU outgroup jokes are likely the norm on the University of Kansas's campus whereas jokes about women and homosexuals at USAFA are part of the cultural norm. The norm at USAFA is likely generated by the low number of females; approximately, a USAFA class boasts 78% male and 22% female. KU's student population is nearly 54% female. Due to the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, most USAFA cadets assume no cadets are homosexual. The mere lack of women at USAFA very well could affect how the general population of cadet perceives how jokes disparaging women and homosexuals will be received. The results of that potential study could show what effect local customs have on an individual's choice of joke humor.

Concluding remarks

This study showed that a person's social identity and identities are continually changing, susceptible to circumstances that we are not aware of, and can lead to changes in behavior. Being aware of the process can help people to recognize their downfalls and other possible ways to positively maintain multiple positive social identities without derogating a specific outgroup. This could potentially be beneficial for male USAFA cadets. This study has revealed that male cadets may have likely been victims of their circumstances. The jokes that are uttered among cadets at USAFA likely were covering up insecurities that the males may or may not be aware existed.

If a male cadet was insecure in any social identity such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, extra-curricular activity, etc., women and homosexuals were an easy target. Normally in a social setting, in the squadron, or even in the classroom, there are one to two females for every eight or nine males. And due to 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell,' the prototypical male cadet assumes that there are no gay men in the room. Therefore, to gain group membership and feel secure in

their social identities, they often tell jokes targeting women and gay men because these groups are easy targets. When they tell these jokes, they risk offending at least two people in the group but are more likely to be accepted by a 15-20 people in the room. For these male cadets, it was a cost benefit analysis; stand up for the minority or become the minority.

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Appendix A: Pre-Testing Results

Table 1

Joke pre-testing ratings

Measures	Humor			Offensiveness		
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N
Irrelevant Jokes	2.13	0.59	25	1.92	0.46	25
Women Jokes	1.98	0.83	25	2.62	0.93	25
Gay Jokes	1.95	0.86	25	2.45	0.63	25
KU Outgroup Jokes	2.15	0.59	25	1.54	0.64	25

Note. N=26. Responses for humor and offensiveness are on a 5-point scale.

Main Study Results

Table 2

Humor Ratings of All Jokes by Threat Condition and Targets of Jokes

			Type of Joke			
Condition	N	All jokes	KU Outgroups	Women	Gay Men	Irrelevant
Control	27	2.70	2.12	3.07	2.50	2.01
Masculinity Threat	31	2.50	2.41	3.01	2.48	2.06
Masculinity Affirmation	32	2.42	2.34	2.88	2.33	2.13
KU Identity Threat	34	2.50	2.53	2.75	2.41	2.07
Total	124	2.46	2.38	2.92	2.43	2.07

Note. Responses for humor and offensiveness are on a 5-point scale. The main effect of condition, $F(3, 120) = .09$, $p = .96$; main effect of joke targets, $F(3, 360) = 63.38$, $p < .001$; interaction between condition and joke targets, $F(9, 360) = 1.88$, $p = .05$.

Table 3

Offensiveness Ratings of All Jokes by Threat Condition and Targets of Jokes

Condition	N	All jokes	KU Outgroups	Women	Gay Men	Irrelevant
			Type of Jokes			
Control	27	1.99	1.66	2.70	2.47	1.30
Masculinity Threat	31	2.04	1.66	2.63	2.72	1.43
Masculinity Affirmation	32	2.08	1.75	2.71	2.62	1.47
KU Identity Threat	34	1.80	1.53	2.35	2.24	1.27
Total	124	1.97	1.65	2.59	2.51	1.37

Note. Responses for humor and offensiveness are on a 5-point scale. The main effect of condition, $F(3, 120) = 1.34$, $p = .27$; main effect of joke targets, $F(3, 360) = 186.97$, $p < .001$; interaction between condition and joke targets, $F(9, 360) = .858$, $p = .56$.

Table 4

Jokes Chosen to Share with the Group by Threat Condition and Targets of Jokes

| Condition | N | Type of Jokes | | | |
		KU Outgroups	Women	Gay Men	Irrelevant
Control	27	1.03	1.22	.52	.22
Masculinity Threat	31	1.61	.90	.32	.16
Masculinity Affirmation	31	1.42	.90	.39	.29
KU Identity Threat	34	1.62	.68	.50	.21
Total	123	1.44	.91	.43	.22

Note. Participants were asked to choose three of their favorite jokes. Scores above reflect the number of jokes chosen by each target group and by condition. The main effect of condition, $F(3, 119) = .62$, $p = .60$; main effect of joke targets, $F(3, 357) = 51.17$, $p < .001$; interaction between condition and joke targets, $F(9, 357) = 1.93$, $p = .05$.

Table 5

Number of jokes chosen by threat and no threat conditions

Condition		Type of Jokes			
	N	KU Outgroups	Women	Gay Men	Irrelevant
No Threat	58	1.24	1.03	.45	.259
Percentage of total jokes chosen		41.3%	34.2%	14.9%	8.6%
Threat	65	1.62	.79	.42	.184
Percentage of total jokes chosen		53.8%	26.2%	13.8%	6.1%

Note. Threat conditions are defined as the masculinity threat condition and the KU identity threat condition. The no threat conditions are defined as the control condition and the masculinity *affirmation* condition. The main effect of condition had a significant impact on the number of jokes chosen that targeted KU outgroups, $F(1, 122) = 4.99$, $p = .03$. The condition also had a marginally significant impact on the number of jokes targeting women, $F(1, 122) = 3.40$, $p = .07$.

Table 6

Number of jokes chosen by the control and identity manipulated conditions

Condition		Type of Jokes			
	N	KU Outgroups	Women	Gay Men	Irrelevant
Control	27	1.04	1.22	.52	.222
Percentage of total jokes chosen		34.6%	40.7%	17.3%	7.4%
Identity Manipulated	96	1.55	.82	.41	.218
Percentage of total jokes chosen		51.7%	27.4%	13.5%	7.3%

Note. The identity manipulated conditions are defined as the masculinity threat condition, the KU identity threat condition, and the masculinity affirmation condition. The main effect of condition had a significant impact on the number of jokes chosen that targeted KU outgroups, $F(1, 122) = 6.59$, $p = .01$. The condition also had a significant impact on the number of jokes participants chose targeting women, $F(1, 122) = 5.30$, $p = .02$.