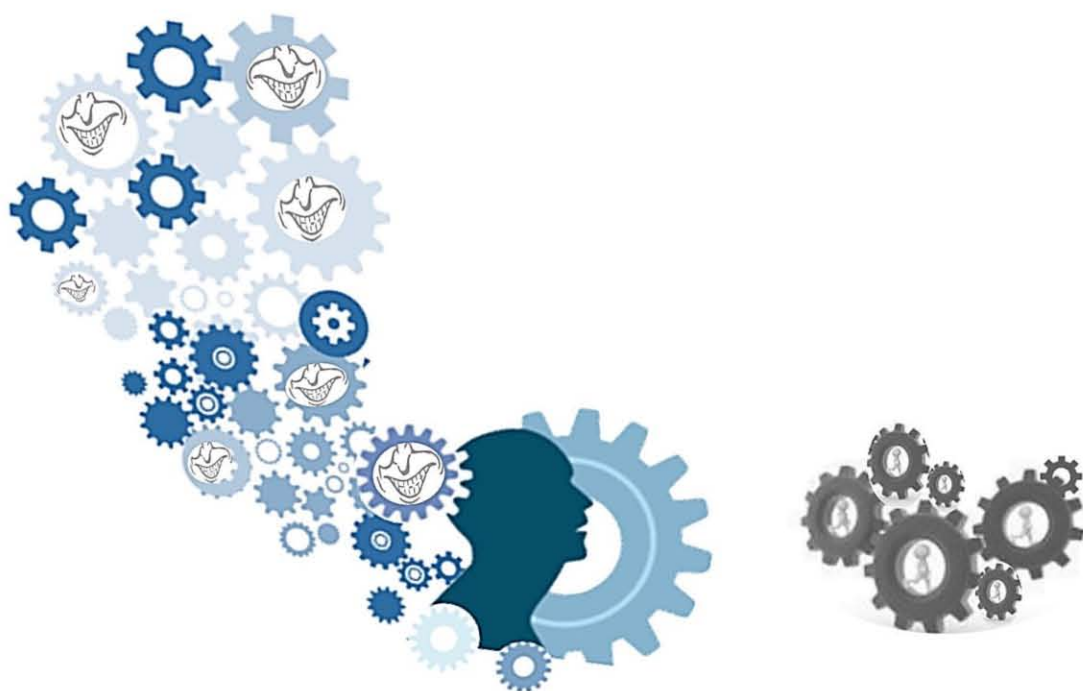


# FUNCIÓN SOCIAL DEL HUMOR:

Efectos del humor de denigración sobre los  
estereotipos

# SOCIAL FUNCTION OF HUMOR:

Effects of disparaging humor on stereotypes



Catalina Argüello Gutiérrez

Tesis doctoral

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**UNIVERSIDAD DE GRANADA**

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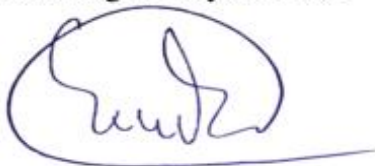
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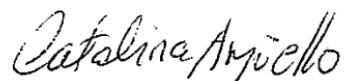


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*"El humor tiene la capacidad de devolverte la certeza de que la vida vale la pena. Y uno se salva, a veces, por el chiste, por el mágico sonido de la risa, que puede no ser tu risa; por la escondida capacidad de tomarte el pelo, de verte desde afuera y reírte de vos mismo".*

**Eduardo Galeano**

*"Humor is perhaps a sense of intellectual perspective: an awareness that some things are really important, others not; and that the two kinds are most oddly jumbled in everyday affairs."*

**Christopher Morley**



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*“Si he visto más lejos es porque estoy sentado sobre los hombros de gigantes.”*

**Isaac Newton**

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de la respiración y a la posibilidad de trascender el instante...

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# Overview



This I conceive to be the chemical function of humor: to change the character of our thought.”

— Lin Yutang

Humor is present on a daily basis and it is used for a variety of functions in everyday social interaction. Even though it frequently serves as means of expressing solidarity, friendliness or amusement, humor may also function in less constructive ways. Therefore, humor has also a “dark side”. From this perspective, humor can have the function of expressing aggression and hostility, as well as be used to insult, denigrate and humiliate others. This kind of humor is known as disparaging humor (Zillmam, 1983) and appears to function as a situational cue that allows people to express their prejudiced attitudes and also promotes a greater tolerance of discrimination against the targeted group (Ford, Petit, Richardson, & Lappi, 2015).

The main goal of this doctoral dissertation was to empirically study the effects of exposure to disparaging humor on stereotyping and negative evaluation of groups. Specifically, we focus on two conditions in which these effects can happen: humor directed to outgroups and humor toward ingroup.

The studies presented in this doctoral dissertation were oriented to contribute from a social psychological approach to a better understanding of the effects of the exposure to disparaging humor. Based on previous research this thesis was particularly focused on studying variables that are of importance in moderating the effects of disparaging humor, that is social power of the humor recipient, group identification with the humor target and humor source.

The thesis is structured in six chapters. The first chapter highlights the importance of humor in society, and provides a review of the main theoretical approximations to humor from a psychological perspective.

The second chapter defines disparaging humor and describes cumulative evidence of the consequences of exposure to this kind of humor. Chapter 3 describes the main goals of this thesis, as well as specific objectives and hypotheses of the studies.

The empirical part of the dissertation could be found in Chapters 4 & 5. Across six studies we examine how individuals deal with humor that disparages an outgroup or an ingroup, as well as other factors that we predict will have an effect on this process.

Finally, in the sixth chapter, we discuss the main findings and comment on implications, limitations, and ideas for future research.

Please note that the papers presented in Chapter 4 and 5 were written with the aim of being submitted for publication, therefore, certain explanations of some concepts and theories inevitably appear several times. Additionally, in order to fulfill the requirements of the International PhD program at the University of Granada, some chapters were written in Spanish (Chapters 1 to 3) and others in English (Chapters 4 onwards).



“El humor refleja las percepciones culturales más profundas, ofreciéndonos así un poderoso instrumento para entender las formas de pensar y sentir que la cultura ha modelado”

— Henk Driessen

*“Humor reflects the deepest cultural perceptions giving us a powerful tool to understand the ways of thinking and feeling that culture has shaped”*

— Henk Driessen



# **Capítulo 1**

## **Conceptualizaciones sobre el humor**

Chapter 1  
Conceptualizations of humor



"El humor es parte de la vida y en consecuencia no debe ser excluido ni aun de la literatura seria."

— Lin Yutang

## **1. Consideraciones sobre el humor como objeto de estudio**

El humor es parte de la vida diaria de seres humanos de todas las edades y culturas. Está presente en muchas de las experiencias que tenemos, influye en las relaciones que establecemos, y en cómo lidiamos con el estrés o el dolor. Por ejemplo, entender las razones de porqué algo resulta divertido, ha sido una pregunta que ha generado un gran debate entre pensadores de campos tan diversos como la filosofía, la lingüística o la biología. Asimismo, comprender qué funciones cumple en la vida social y cuáles son sus implicaciones, ha sido motivo de múltiples discusiones desde distintas perspectivas.

Todas las culturas de alguna u otra forma han desarrollado un espacio para la interacción humorística, pasando ésta a formar parte de la cotidianidad de cualquier sociedad, si bien en cada una de ellas se manifiesta de manera distinta (Martin y Kuiper, 1999; Provine y Fischer, 1989; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952). La mayoría de las investigaciones sostiene que los estímulos que son considerados graciosos en las diferentes culturas, tienen en común la idea de que se trata de una imagen, texto o acto que es de alguna manera incongruente, inusual, inesperado, sorprendente o extraordinario (Martin, 2007). Paralelamente, es necesario que se perciba que el estímulo no es serio y que está dentro de un contexto distendido y con claves de diversión.

Específicamente, la investigación científica del humor plantea una serie de retos para la psicología. Por ejemplo, ¿cómo se procesa la comunicación humorística?, ¿cómo se desarrolla el sentido del humor?, ¿qué hace que algunas personas se rían más fácilmente que otras?, ¿cuál es el papel del humor en las interacciones sociales?, ¿puede el humor transmitir ideas prejuiciosas?, ¿hay alguna relación entre el humor y la salud física y psicológica? Estas preguntas son sólo algunas de las cuestiones que ponen de manifiesto

que un abordaje completo dirigido a la descripción, explicación y predicción del humor debe tener en cuenta áreas de investigación muy diversas dentro de la psicología. Siguiendo a Ruch (2008) el estudio del humor conectaría fundamentalmente con aproximaciones centradas en el estudio de los procesos cognitivos (e.g., comprensión o percepción del humor), emociones (e.g., respuestas afectivas ante estímulos humorísticos), manifestaciones conductuales (e.g., el estudio de la risa como su respuesta conductual más típica), aspectos culturales (e.g., diferencias transculturales en la expresión del humor), diferencias individuales (e.g., en la apreciación de distintos tipos de humor) e interacciones grupales (e.g., acercamiento entre los miembros).

Desde estas consideraciones, es importante reconocer que las situaciones humorísticas se producen fundamentalmente en contextos de interacción social. Las personas se ríen y bromean más cuando están con otros que cuando están solas (Provine, 2005; Provine y Fischer, 1989). Son pocas las ocasiones en que el humor se produce en solitario, y estas serían situaciones pseudosociales como ver un programa televisivo, leer un libro o recordar algo gracioso (Martin, 2007). En la interacción social, el humor es una especie de situación de juego, en la cual los seres humanos interactúan lúdicamente, favoreciéndose las relaciones desde un punto de vista social, emocional y cognitivo (Bateson, 2005). Es así como puede afirmarse que la función más obvia atribuida al humor es la de ser un medio para expresar empatía, amabilidad y cortesía (Brown y Levinson, 1987). Sin embargo, el humor no necesariamente actúa siempre de manera prosocial, y en muchas situaciones es una manera de comunicar mensajes ofensivos y de agredir a otros. En otras palabras, el humor es un fenómeno eminentemente social que puede cumplir un rango amplio de funciones en la interacción social.

Esta diversidad de funciones del humor, de variables individuales que se relacionan con él, así como variables que lo promueven o lo inhiben, aspectos culturales y normas

sociales, acaban teniendo su reflejo en la multiplicidad de modelos teóricos que han sido generados para intentar explicar este complejo fenómeno que es el humor.

## **2. Aproximaciones teóricas al estudio del humor**

Muchas son las teorías que pretenden explicar el humor y sus mecanismos. No obstante en este apartado solamente se hará referencia a cuatro grandes aproximaciones que se consideran pertinentes para el abordaje del humor desde la psicología, y que servirían para aglutinar a la mayoría de las teorías surgidas sobre el humor. Para una revisión más extensa de la literatura sobre el humor pueden consultarse los trabajos de Martin (2007), Raskin (2008) y Roedelein (2002).

### **2.1 Teoría psicoanalítica**

Freud planteó que el humor y la risa permiten una liberación de energía reprimida produciendo un alivio a esa tensión. Las reacciones frente al estímulo humorístico estarían motivadas por una necesidad de liberar tensiones (ya sea de índole sexual o agresivo) que han sido inhibidas y que no pueden ser expresadas de manera directa. Se asume que las diferencias individuales en las respuestas a la exposición a chistes, ocurrencias graciosas u otros estímulos, reflejan las diferencias en la intensidad de las emociones reprimidas que se han asociado con el estímulo (Wyer y Collins, 1992). Desde esta visión se ha teorizado sobre tres distintas categorías de experiencias alegres: los chistes, lo cómico y el humor. Cada una de estas experiencias tendría su propio mecanismo de liberación de energía inconsciente. Dentro de estas experiencias la que mayor relación con la presente tesis doctoral es la del chiste, y se entendería como un medio de expresión de los deseos reprimidos.

Para Freud el chiste implica un propósito consciente, hay una intención y además debe haber alguien que lo cuente, alguien que lo escuche y algo que contar. Es por este

motivo, que Freud (1905/1976) sostiene que el chiste es la más social de las transacciones psíquicas que conllevan una ganancia de placer, y lo considera como el sucesor del juego infantil por ser una constante búsqueda de dicho placer. Los chistes, se caracterizan por mecanismos como la condensación, unificación o el doble sentido, que sirven de distracción para el superyó y permiten el disfrute de los impulsos sexuales y agresivos. La energía inhibida que se requeriría para reprimir estos impulsos se vuelve superflua como resultado del chiste y su energía se libera en la forma de risa. Este mecanismo permite un disfrute de lo ilícito, al no sentirse culpa puesto que se está distraendo al superyó (Billig, 2001a; Freud, 1905/1976).

En suma, desde esta perspectiva ha habido un énfasis en la reacción al humor, siendo su principal hipótesis el alivio, producto de los procesos internos desencadenados al liberar la energía reprimida. Varias investigaciones se han desarrollado bajo estos supuestos, aunque los resultados siempre han sido ambiguos, sin acabar de respaldar lo establecido por las teorías psicoanalíticas (Byrne, 1956; Epstein y Smith, 1956; Ullmann y Lim, 1962).

## **2.2 Teorías del arousal o excitación**

Estas teorías también se centran en el proceso de liberación de tensión que conlleva el humor, pero a diferencia de la propuesta psicoanalítica, se basan en el rol del arousal psicológico y fisiológico. Actualmente estas teorías han sido desarrolladas desde el campo de la activación fisiológica y las bases biológicas (Fry, 2002), proponiéndose que el humor produce una excitación a través de las propiedades del estímulo humorístico asociadas a lo novedoso, la complejidad, la incongruencia y posiblemente a la redundancia. Berlyne (1972) sostiene que hasta un cierto punto, un mayor arousal conlleva un placer mayor



cuando se libera. De este modo, se esperaría un arousal en U invertida, siendo el placer mayor en niveles moderados de arousal.

Si bien las ideas de Berlyne sobre la excitación ante el humor han encontrado argumentos a favor de la activación del sistema simpático durante los procesos humorísticos, no hay evidencia que apoye la idea de una “activación óptima” a través de un modelo de U invertida, y más bien en algunas ocasiones se ha encontrado una relación lineal entre el arousal y el placer (Martin, 2007).

### **2.3 Teorías de la superioridad**

Estas teorías son las primeras que buscaron explicar el humor, siendo Platón y Aristóteles los primeros en proponerlas (Martin, 1998). Se asume que el humor se produce por las situaciones o características de desventaja o debilidad de los demás, siendo la risa una expresión de los sentimientos de superioridad de unas personas sobre otras. De esta forma, la risa involucra cierto grado de maldad hacia el otro, y deja entrever la sensación de sentirse mejor que el resto. Siguiendo esta línea, fue Hobbes quien sistematizó formalmente estas ideas resaltando que los humanos continuamente se comparan unos con otros (Roeckelein, 2002). De esta forma, el humor es un medio de comparación que busca resaltar las diferencias entre los grupos y preservar las jerarquías sociales.

Las teorías de la superioridad postulan que la respuesta al humor surge al exaltar los defectos o debilidades de los demás (Gruner, 1997; Hobbes, 1840). Para Gruner el humor es agresión, aunque entiéndelo como una agresión lúdica, similar a la que se observaría en los juegos de peleas típicos de la niñez. Este juego, además de ser agresivo, tiene ganadores y perdedores, siendo en este caso el sentimiento placentero del humor, el resultado asociado al hecho de haber salido victorioso de dicho juego.

Zillmann y Cantor (1972) proponen que una reacción humorística frente a las desgracias ajenas está fuertemente influenciada por la relación que se tenga con esta persona. De la misma forma, La Fave y Mannell (1976) explican que las personas tienen una actitud polivalente hacia los demás y que por tanto se pueden tener múltiples actitudes, tanto positivas como negativas hacia ellos.

Dado el interés de la presente tesis doctoral en el contenido del humor y sus posibles efectos, las teorías de superioridad-denigración serán abordadas con mayor detalle en el capítulo 2.

#### **2.4 Teorías de la incongruencia**

Para este grupo de teorías, el interés se centra en los aspectos cognitivos involucrados en el humor (Attardo, Hempelmann, y Di Maio, 2002). Se concibe el humor como producto de una asociación inesperada entre dos ideas o eventos que desde un enfoque lógico no tendrían sentido. El humor ocurriría al entrar en conflicto dos marcos de referencia. Se sugiere que la percepción de incongruencia es un determinante esencial para catalogar algo como gracioso, por lo tanto lo gracioso sería además inusual y sorprendente (Martin, 2007).

Es importante resaltar que si bien las teorías sobre la incongruencia tiene un papel dominante en el campo del humor, aún existe un debate sobre el rol que tendría la resolución (Carretero-Dios, Pérez, y Buela, 2006). Una primera posición considera que la incongruencia es en sí misma necesaria y suficiente para la experiencia del humor y que por lo tanto no se requeriría la resolución, mientras que la otra posición postula la necesidad de resolver esta incongruencia como un elemento indispensable para el proceso del humor (Forabosco, 1992; Wycoff y Prior, 2003).

Es importante mencionar que los cuatro grandes marcos teóricos descritos anteriormente, o bien se centran en las características del material humorístico o bien se centran en los procesos específicos que dan cuenta de cómo podría funcionar el humor. Para esto se plantean funciones fisiológicas de activación o de índole psicológica, que se enfocan en la descarga como aspecto fundamental del humor. Las teorías sobre incongruencia enfatizan la ironía y la sorpresa en el contenido del humor, mientras que las de superioridad ponen su énfasis en las relaciones antagónicas entre los productores del humor y las personas objeto de éste.

Sin embargo, son muchas más las funciones que han sido vinculadas al humor y que se no ven representadas por lo dicho hasta el momento. El humor puede cumplir otras funciones que son de interés para fines de la presente tesis doctoral y que están relacionadas con la comprensión de sus implicaciones sociales. Es por esto que se hace necesario dedicar el siguiente apartado a describir de manera breve algunas otras funciones atribuidas al humor.

### **3. ¿Qué funciones sociales puede tener el humor?**

Las expresiones humorísticas tales como los chistes o las bromas se configuran a partir de lo que es social y culturalmente relevante. Los temas a partir de los cuales se genera el humor son centrales para la cultura e incluso la moral de una sociedad o grupo social (Kuipers, 2008).

Es decir, los temas del humor hacen referencia a la manera en que las sociedades construyen su mundo y establecen límites de lo que se considera gracioso o no. Por otro lado, el humor es utilizado por miembros de diversos grupos sociales con distintos objetivos y significados. Entonces, ¿puede decirse que el humor cumple alguna función social?

Al respecto, y desde un enfoque funcionalista del humor, se propone que la función central del humor sería la de aliviar tensiones entre los grupos con el fin de mantener el orden social (Apte, 1985; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952; Sykes, 1966). De esta manera, se enfatiza que el uso del humor puede orientarse al control social, reforzando normas implícitas de comportamiento social (Billigb, 2001; Stephenson, 1951; Powell, 1977;), y favoreciendo la cohesión de grupo (Coser, 1960; Fine, 1983; Provine, 2000).

Por otra parte, se propone que el rol del humor es la construcción de significados y relaciones sociales. Desde esta visión, el humor cobra importancia en las interacciones humanas gracias a su naturaleza ambigua, siendo un recurso para la negociación, el acercamiento y los procesos comunicativos en general (Jefferson, 1979; Robinson y Smith-Lovin, 2001).

Siguiendo esta línea, Ziv (1984, 2010) ha propuesto que el humor desempeña funciones tanto a nivel personal como social. La primera función es la de permitir acercarse a los tabúes sociales, siendo una medio relativamente seguro para expresar ideas sobre temas controversiales. Una segunda función sería la de permitir la crítica social, y el ridiculizar a las instituciones y a los individuos, siendo así un medio para mantener el status quo o para producir cambios en el sistema. La tercera función sería consolidar la pertenencia a un grupo, al ser una importante base de la cohesión social, la comunicación y el inicio de relaciones interpersonales. Una cuarta función es la de servir como un mecanismo de defensa para la adaptación ante situaciones de alta intensidad tales como el miedo y la ansiedad. Una última función es la de juego intelectual, permitiendo salir del pensamiento lógico convencional, y donde el objetivo fundamental es la diversión por la diversión.

Puede decirse entonces que el humor tiene la potencialidad de expresar ideas culturalmente compartidas, ya sea con el fin del mero entretenimiento, de fortalecer el orden social o también con la intención de trasgredir los límites impuestos.

Como se ha visto, todas estas posiciones sostienen que el humor cumple varias funciones sociales, las cuales se expresan en una serie de interacciones en el área de la comunicación, la persuasión, la percepción social y las relaciones intergrupales, entre otras. A continuación se exploran algunas de estas funciones, dejando claro que la lista podría ampliarse, y que se presentan con un propósito básicamente ilustrativo.

### **3.1. Comunicación y gestión del discurso**

El humor tiene la particularidad de ser un canal de comunicación sutil pues siempre deja abierta la posibilidad de interpretar los mensajes, es decir existe la posibilidad de la ambigüedad en la transmisión de contenidos, al ser posible ampararse siempre en la excusa de que era solo una broma.

Además, la comunicación humorística puede cumplir una variedad de funciones tales como reivindicar o rechazar la responsabilidad sobre las acciones cometidas, mostrar valor o disminuir la vergüenza, enfatizar compromisos o liberarnos de ellos (Kane et al., 1977; Meyer, 2000).

Al respecto, Mulkay (1988) propone que las personas interactúan entre ellas a través de dos formas principales: la manera seria y la manera humorística. La primera es lógica y coherente, y trata de evitar ambigüedades; mientras que la segunda permite incongruencias y se aleja que una idea única en la comprensión de los mensajes. El estilo humorístico da cabida a una multiplicidad de factores para la percepción de la realidad y permite una comunicación en la cual coexisten interpretaciones del mismo mensaje.

Por su parte Meyer (2000) analiza el humor como un arma de doble filo, y propone cuatro funciones básicas del humor en la comunicación. Dos de estas funciones tienden a acercar a los participantes de la comunicación, y serían la identificación y la clarificación. Mientras que las otras dos, más bien distancian a los interlocutores, siendo la imposición y la diferenciación. De esta forma, las dos primeras unen al comunicador con su audiencia a través de un proceso de identificación, mientras se clarifican posiciones y valores. Por el contrario, las funciones de separación se dan a partir de la imposición o reforzamiento de normas así como la diferenciación explícita de lo que se considera aceptable o no en el comportamiento de personas o grupos.

En este sentido, se ha observado que el humor puede ser utilizado para modificar el flujo conversacional (Norrick, 2003), para generar una mayor participación en una conversación grupal (La Gaipa, 1977), para disminuir la agresividad de una afirmación (Dews, Kaplan, y Winner, 1995) o para mitigar situaciones conflictivas (Norrick y Spitz, 2008).

### **3.2 Persuasión y publicidad**

De acuerdo a Martin (2007) los resultados de las investigaciones sobre humor y persuasión sugieren que esta relación es bastante compleja, y que algunos tipos de humor contribuyen a la persuasión en algunas circunstancias pero no en otras.

Al respecto, el modelo de probabilidad de elaboración (ELM) de Cacioppo y colaboradores explica cómo los individuos procesan mensajes persuasivos y puede ser de utilidad para un acercamiento a la relación entre humor y persuasión (Petty y Cacioppo, 1984; Petty, Cacioppo, y Goldman, 1981; Petty, Cacioppo, y Schumann, 1983). Este modelo propone dos rutas para entender la persuasión: la central y la periférica. Al utilizar una ruta central, se procesan los argumentos de los mensajes y se genera información

relacionada con sus argumentos, mientras que al utilizar la ruta periférica la atención se presta a las señales externas al propio contenido (como la fuente, forma del mensaje, etc.). La investigación sugiere que los efectos del humor sobre la persuasión estarían más relacionados con la ruta periférica que con la central, debido a su mayor influencia sobre variables emocionales que cognitivas (Duncan y Nelson, 1985; Lyttle, 2001; Martin, 2007; Wanzer, Frymier, y Irwin, 2010).

Si bien hay poca evidencia de que el humor aumente la credibilidad percibida de la fuente de un mensaje, o que mejore su comprensión, se ha encontrado que el humor aumenta el grado en que se considera agradable la fuente y el producto que se anuncia (Weinberger y Gulas, 1992). También se ha observado que el humor tiene efectos emocionales en el público, tendiendo a ponerlos en un estado de ánimo más positivo (Moran, 1996).

Por otra parte, el humor suele llamar la atención, haciendo que la gente atienda a los aspectos humorísticos del mensaje (Madden y Weinberger, 1982) y distrayéndoles de posibles debilidades en el argumento lógico (Jones, 2005).

En conjunto, estos resultados también sugieren que el papel del humor en la persuasión depende de la actitud previa de los receptores (Chattopadhyay y Basu, 1990; Conway y Dube, 2002), de las características de la audiencia, del tema y de la fuente del mensaje (Martin, 2007; Wanzer et al., 2010).

### **3.3 Relaciones interpersonales y entre grupos**

El humor puede usarse para esconder o demostrar creencias, opiniones y actitudes sobre diferentes grupos o instituciones y así eventualmente ir contra aquello que, de otra forma, no podría ser atacado. El uso de algunas palabras grotescas, o de expresiones con doble sentido, crea un espacio libre de ciertos riesgos para expresar la verdadera posición.

Un ejemplo de esto es el uso de ciertos eufemismos o disfemismos que permiten atacar de manera graciosa a personas y grupos sociales (Martin, 2007). Cuando se usa la ironía el mensaje es visto como menos agresivo que una afirmación directa, además de ser considerado más gracioso (Dews, Kaplan, y Winner, 1995).

Además según Long y Graesser (1988) el humor puede servir también para reforzar normas sociales y para ejercer control sobre la conducta de los demás. Al usar la ironía, el sarcasmo o la sátira para burlarse de las creencias y actitudes de otros, los miembros de un mismo grupo pueden comunicar expectativas implícitas existentes en dicho grupo.

Así mismo, el humor puede ser un medio para restablecer las normas del grupo y sancionar a quienes intentar transgredirlas (Coser, 1960; Robinson y Smith-Lovin, 2001; Sayre, 2001). Además, el humor se vincula al poder, permitiendo hacer humor sobre ciertos grupos y en ciertos contextos y sancionándolo en otros (Kuipers, 2011).

Por último, el humor destaca como una de las herramientas preferidas para establecer relaciones ya sea de amistad, sexo ocasional, noviazgo o matrimonio (Goodwin y Tang, 1991; Sprecher y Regan, 2002). También se ha encontrado que puede facilitar la interacción grupal (Kuiper, Kirsh, y Leite, 2010) y crear expectativas sobre los demás (Cann y Calhoun, 2001; Mettee, Hrelec, y Wilkens, 1971), así como también establecer límites simbólicos sobre el gusto y la distinción asociados a diferentes grupos sociales (Kuipers, 2009, 2013). De esta forma el humor es un medio de comunicación de ideas, pensamientos y propuestas que permiten el desarrollo de percepciones sociales acerca de lo que podemos esperar de los otros y sobre lo que es adecuado y deseable para estos.

#### **4. Consideraciones finales**

Existen varias aproximaciones a las funciones sociales del humor que reflejan la importancia que ocupa dentro de todas las manifestaciones del ser humano. Tanto la producción del humor, entendida como un proceso creativo, como la apreciación del



mismo, requieren de mecanismos cognitivos individuales y de procesos sociales para su comprensión. El estudio del humor particularmente desde la psicología social hace referencia necesariamente al análisis de las dinámicas entre e intragrupos, además de indagar en las intenciones y los efectos que pueden generar distintos tipos de humor.

Si bien puede existir un cierto consenso sobre los aspectos positivos del humor y sus manifestaciones, existe también un creciente interés por el “lado oscuro” del humor, es decir, qué sucede cuando a través de una comunicación humorística se trasgreden los límites de lo socialmente correcto. Dentro de estas manifestaciones, se encuentran el uso del humor para agredir, humillar o ridiculizar, sobre todo a los miembros de exogrupos, es decir el humor de denigración. El interés de la presente tesis doctoral se centra especialmente en las consecuencias psicosociales de la exposición a éste tipo de humor sobre los estereotipos grupales.

Por todo lo dicho, es importante reconocer que las teorías explicativas del humor difieren en muchos aspectos, en especial en el énfasis que le otorgan al contenido del humor frente al contexto social en el que se produce. Las teorías psicoanalíticas y de arosual se enfocan en mayor medida a los aspectos cognitivos y fisiológicos de la actividad humorística. Las teorías de incongruencia-resolución enfatizan la ironía y la sorpresa en el contenido del humor, mientras que las de superioridad-denigración ponen su énfasis en las relaciones antagónicas entre los productores del humor y las personas objeto de éste.

En este sentido, para estudiar los efectos que el humor de denigración puede producir a nivel grupal, el contenido del humor y el contexto de interpretación son de mayor interés que los aspectos de activación fisiológica o procesamiento cognitivo. La teoría de superioridad, permite reconocer que un tema muy recurrente en el humor es la búsqueda de distinción de unos grupos frente a otros, a través de la ridiculización o humillación. No obstante, es necesario reconocer que interactúan otras variables más allá

de la mera agresión, haciendo necesario tener en cuenta otros aspectos como el prejuicio, las relaciones intergrupales, la identificación con el grupo y el contexto específico. Estos y otros aspectos sirven de referencia para el desarrollo de los estudios que componen esta tesis y se abordan con mayor profundidad en el siguiente capítulo.

# **Capítulo 2**

## **Exposición al humor de denigración**

Chapter 2  
Exposure to disparaging humor



“Everything is funny, as long as it's happening to somebody else”.

*Will Rogers*

### **1. Definición de humor de denigración**

Uno de los tipos de humor más controversiales es el humor de denigración. Este tipo de humor se refiere a una comunicación cuyo objetivo es promover el entretenimiento a través de la denigración, humillación y menosprecio de una persona o grupo social, resaltando una diferencia con la persona o grupo objeto de la denigración (Ferguson y Ford, 2008; Zillmann, 1983).

De esta forma, el humor de denigración se da cuando se intentan ridiculizar las características ya sean físicas, psicológicas o sociales, asociadas a un grupo o persona (e.g., las mujeres, los grupos minoritarios, los trabajadores, etc.). Un ejemplo de este tipo de humor sería el siguiente:

*Se abre el telón y aparece un gitano... ¡desaparece el telón!*<sup>1</sup>

Este tipo de humor funciona a través de la creación de un estado mental “poco serio” que lleva a procesar la información humorística de forma menos crítica (Attardo, 1993; Berlyne, 1972). Al comunicar que el mensaje se puede interpretar como “solamente un chiste” el humor de denigración puede denigrar a su objeto sin ninguna dificultad o crítica (e.g., Johnson, 1990; Tragesser y Lippman, 2005).

A partir de hacer mofa de una visión particular de un grupo, el humor de denigración puede actuar como un abrasivo de las relaciones intergrupales, teniendo implicaciones tanto a nivel personal como social (Ford y Ferguson, 2004; Ford, Richardson y Petit, 2015; Martineau, 1972).

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<sup>1</sup> Tomado de Carretero-Dios (2005). Ítems seleccionados para la categoría humor de denigración en la construcción de la Escala de Apreciación del Humor (EAHU).

A continuación se presenta, de forma resumida, y siguiendo a Ferguson y Ford (2008), una descripción de cómo las teorías más importantes entienden el humor de denigración y los mecanismos que provocan que se perciba como divertido. Una revisión más extensa de la literatura sobre el humor de denigración puede encontrarse en los trabajos de Zillmann y Cantor (1996) y Zillmann (1983).

## **2. Enfoques teóricos del humor de denigración**

### **2.1 Teorías psicoanalíticas**

Desde la corriente psicoanalítica, el humor de denigración es una forma indirecta de agredir o atacar a un adversario (Freud, 1905/1976). A través de la inofensiva —al menos en apariencia— cualidad del humor, se enmascaran los instintos destructivos y se permite su liberación por medio de la expresión humorística. El humor de denigración sirve por tanto para expresar de manera socialmente aceptable los impulsos inconscientes inaceptables (Sev'er y Ungar, 1997).

Así, al permitir la liberación de impulsos hostiles, el humor de denigración actúa como una forma de catarsis, reduciendo la energía psíquica hostil (Singer, 1968). Tal como se muestra en la Figura 1 el entretenimiento y el placer surgen al no tener que gastar recursos psicológicos para inhibir los impulsos reprimidos y de la catarsis emocional que representa liberar la agresión reprimida.

No obstante, cabe destacar que no se han encontrado evidencias suficientes para apoyar estas hipótesis. Por ejemplo, Epstein y Smith (1956) no encontraron relación entre el grado en el cual los sujetos reprimían su hostilidad y la diversión causada por caricaturas que contenían temáticas hostiles o agresivas. Otros estudios señalan que la exposición al humor de denigración más bien incrementa las expresiones de agresión (e.g., Landy, Mettee, 1969; Mueller y Donnerstein, 1977; Singer, 1968).



**Figura 1. Proceso del humor de denigración desde la teoría psicoanalítica**

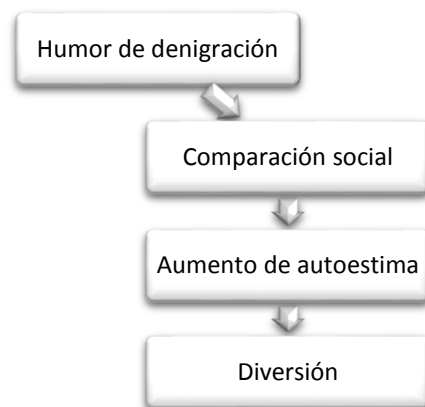
En este sentido, Ryan y Kanjorski (1998) reportaron que el disfrute del humor sexista se correlaciona positivamente con varias medidas de agresión sexual. Estos resultados son congruentes con aquellos que muestran que, en términos generales, la catarsis no suele disminuir sino aumentar la agresividad (Bushman, 2002; Bushman, Baumeister, y Stack, 1999).

## **2.2 Teorías de superioridad-denigración**

Desde las teorías de superioridad-denigración se concibe al humor de denigración como el resultado de sentimientos de superioridad frente al reconocimiento de las desgracias o desventuras de los otros (Zillmann, 1983). El entretenimiento se deriva entonces de la comparación social con los considerados inferiores y del sentimiento de autoestima acrecentada que esto conlleva (Gruner, 1997; Wills, 1981). Si bien orígenes de esta propuesta pueden remontarse a Platón y Aristóteles, fue Hobbes (1840), quien sistematizó formalmente estas ideas a partir de la importancia de un incremento en la autoestima resultante de la observación del infortunio ajeno. En otras palabras, se disfruta

del humor de denigración porque éste hace que las personas se sientan mejor cuando se comparan “hacia abajo” con el grupo o persona objeto del humor.

A partir de algunas investigaciones en el área, los planteamientos iniciales de la teoría de superioridad fueron incorporando otros elementos relevantes para comprender el humor de denigración (e.g., Middleton, 1959; Priest, 1966; Wolff, Smith, y Murray, 1934). En concreto, estos autores mostraron que las personas tienden a disfrutar más del humor que denigra al exogrupo que al endogrupo; por tanto, el concepto de afiliación se sumó como un aspecto importante para la interpretación del humor en contexto intergrupales. De esta forma, una persona experimentaría un incremento en su autoestima al percibir la denigración hacia personas o grupos con los que no se siente afiliado (ver Figura 2). Desde este planteamiento, la diversión del humor de denigración no se produce por el menosprecio dirigido a una persona en particular, sino a su grupo social de pertenencia.



**Figura 2. Proceso del humor de denigración desde la teoría de superioridad**

La Fave y colaboradores extienden el modelo de Wolf et al. (1934) al introducir el concepto de identificación de clase (La Fave, 1972; La Fave y Mannell, 1976), un concepto que engloba tanto la pertenencia grupal como las actitudes hacia una clase o categoría de personas (La Fave y Mannell, 1976). Desde esta perspectiva, para que una



persona incremente su autoestima a través del humor de denigración no es necesario que la persona pertenezca —o se encuentre afiliada— al grupo social que sale favorecido en el contenido humorístico, basta con que la persona tenga actitudes y sentimientos negativos hacia el grupo denigrado. De forma complementaria, Zillmann y Cantor (1996) proponen el enfoque *disposicional* en el que se examina la relación entre la persona que recibe el humor y el target del humor. Ésta relación se había tratado frecuentemente como una variable categórica o dicotómica: se pertenece o no a un grupo; se tienen sentimientos positivos o negativos hacia un grupo. Desde un enfoque disposicional, sin embargo, las actitudes hacia el grupo denigrado se consideran una variable continua que va desde una evaluación afectiva totalmente negativa, pasando por un punto neutral, hasta una totalmente positiva (Zillmann, 1983; Zillmann y Cantor, 1996). Así, se propone que las actitudes que se tengan sobre un grupo son tan determinantes como la pertenencia grupal, y que la diversión causada por este tipo de humor aumenta en la medida en que se tengan actitudes negativas con el grupo objeto del humor.

Desde la psicología social se han llevado a cabo varias investigaciones que han puesto a prueba esta teoría. Por ejemplo, Middleton (1959) encontró que los participantes afroamericanos se divertían más con los chistes que denigraban a los blancos que los propios blancos. De manera similar, las personas consideran más divertidos los chistes que denigran al partido político opuesto al de su preferencia (Priest, 1966; Priest y Abrahams, 1970) y las personas altamente etnocéntricas consideraban más divertidos los chistes que denigraban a un miembro de un exogrupo étnico valorado negativamente que aquellos chistes en los que se denigraba a un miembro de una etnia desconocida (Gallois y Callan, 1985).

Zillmann y Cantor (1996) presentaron caricaturas en las que se mostraban escenarios de denigración entre un profesor y un estudiante —en una ceremonia de

graduación, el profesor, cuando iba a entregar el diploma a un estudiante, en vez de darle la mano le arrojaba un pastel en la cara; o viceversa—. Los estudiantes encontraron más divertida la situación en la que el estudiante, un miembro del endogrupo, le arrojaba el pastel en la cara al profesor, que cuando el profesor lo hacía al estudiante.

Además, existe amplia evidencia empírica que muestra que las personas disfrutaban más este tipo de humor de denigración hacia las mujeres en la medida en que tengan actitudes sexista contra ellas (Bill y Naus, 1992; Brodzinsky, Barnet, y Aiello, 1981; Ford, 2000; Greenwood y Isbell, 2002; Thomae y Viki, 2013; Thomas y Esses, 2004).

Otro modelo importante que parte de estas teorías es el modelo de Martineau (1972). Se trata de una propuesta que parte desde lo grupal con el fin de comprender las funciones del humor de denigración. Este enfoque postula que el humor puede tener dos funciones: ser un lubricante social, reforzando la integración entre grupos, alcanzando consensos y aumentando la moral; o por el contrario ser un abrasivo social, sirviendo a la desintegración de los grupos y a crear una disposición hostil hacia los exogrupos. Martineau puso particular interés en mostrar que estas dos funciones del humor de denigración parecen ocurrir al mismo tiempo, tal como lo observó Obrdlik (1942) durante la segunda guerra mundial, cuando los checos bajo la ocupación nazi usaron humor que denigraba a los alemanes para, de forma simultánea, mantener la cohesión endogrupal y generar actitudes negativas hacia los nazis.

Se propone que habría una serie de variables que influyen en las funciones sociales del humor de denigración. Las variables destacadas por Martineau (1972) son: quién inicia el humor (la persona o grupo concreto), la audiencia o los receptores del humor, el target del humor, la valoración del humor (si se considera afirmativo o denigrante), el contexto cultural y las posiciones sociales de las partes involucradas. Así, se

postula que el humor configura las relaciones humanas en tres escenarios diferentes: situaciones intragrupalas, situaciones intergrupales y las interacciones entregrupos.

La investigación actualmente se ha centrado, a partir de la propuesta de Martineau, en entender cómo el humor de denigración afecta la forma en que las personas piensan y responden en función de que sean miembros del endogrupo o del exogrupo denigrado. En esta línea Janes y Olson (2015) encontraron apoyo a la hipótesis de Martineau de que el humor de denigración hacia el endogrupo podría funcionar como una forma de controlar el comportamiento del endogrupo, provocando una mayor conformidad con las normas del grupo. Sus resultados mostraron que los participantes que observaron las burlas que se les hicieron a los demás, presentan una mayor conformidad a una norma grupal en comparación con los participantes en otras condiciones.

En otro estudio se analizó el uso del humor de denigración según el estatus de los jueces en el programa *American Idol*, y se encontró apoyo a la hipótesis de Martineau de que el estatus de los miembros del grupo influye en la frecuencia en el uso del humor, siendo que los hombres recurrieron al humor de denigración en mayor medida que las mujeres, y que los jueces con mayor estatus lo utilizaban más que los de menos estatus (Montemurro y Benfield, 2015).

Por último, Pina y Thomae (2015) revisaron la literatura existente sobre el humor de denigración desde el modelo de Martineau y la teoría de identidad social. Se centraron en la evidencia sobre la forma en que funciona este tipo de humor, bien como (a) un predictor de la cohesión del endogrupo masculino, (b) un facilitador o resultado del acoso sexual, o (c) un moderador de la relación entre las actitudes sexistas y la proclividad a violar o la culpabilización de la víctima de violación. Proponen que el humor de denigración hacia las mujeres permite a los hombres establecer una identidad positiva y reducir la amenaza hacia el endogrupo, siendo una manera de fortalecer al grupo y

promover la adherencia a ciertas normas para mantenerse en su posición de superioridad en la jerarquía.

De acuerdo con las teorías expuestas, es importante resaltar que tanto las relaciones entre los grupos como las actitudes que se tengan hacia sus miembros, son variables importantes para comprender los efectos del humor de denigración. Por este motivo, se hará referencia a una de las teorías más influyentes en la psicología social para entender los procesos intergrupales, la teoría de la identidad social, con el fin de explicar la evidencia encontrada y proponer nuevas hipótesis relativas a los efectos de la exposición al humor de denigración.

### **3. Teoría de la identidad social y humor de denigración**

La Teoría de la Identidad Social (TIS), desarrollada para explicar las relaciones intergrupales (Tajfel, 1986; Tajfel y Turner, 1979) ha sido propuesta también para comprender los efectos de la exposición al humor de denigración (Abrams y Bippus, 2011; Bourhis, Gadfield, Giles, y Tajfel, 1977; Ford y Ferguson, 2004).

Desde la TIS, se define la identidad social como la parte del auto concepto individual derivado de la pertenencia a distintos grupos sociales, y que se hace saliente en contextos intergrupales donde las personas se categorizan a sí mismas en función de su pertenencia a un grupo social (Tajfel y Turner, 1986). En contraste, la identidad personal se deriva de las percepciones de los atributos únicos de cada persona, y se hace saliente en contextos interpersonales en los cuales las personas se centran en sus diferencias individuales sin preocuparse explícitamente por su pertenencia a un grupo (Tajfel y Turner, 1979; 1986). La identidad personal y la identidad social pueden ser entendidas como dos polos del continuo de la categorización social (Turner, 1987).

De acuerdo con esta teoría, las personas buscan mantener una identidad social positiva —entendida como la comparación del propio grupo con otros grupos sociales, en

la cual el endogrupo se distingue de manera positiva— y siguen varias estrategias para alcanzarla, que incluirían la movilidad individual, la creatividad social o la competición social (Hogg y Abrams, 1988; Tajfel, 1981). Una de estas estrategias, como se puede ver en la Figura 3, puede ser el humor de denigración (Abrams y Bippus, 2011; Bourhis, Gadfield, Giles, y Tajfel, 1977). Por ejemplo, si el grupo en posición mayoritaria (e.g., españoles) se siente amenazado por un grupo en una posición minoritaria (e.g., inmigrantes), podría hacer un chiste con la intención de mostrarlos como poco competentes o inferiores.



**Figura 3. Proceso del humor de denigración desde la teoría de la identidad social**

Es importante mencionar que, si bien la TIS y las teorías de la superioridad comparten algunos aspectos centrales en sus predicciones sobre el humor de denigración, existen diferencias sutiles a nivel conceptual (Ferguson y Ford, 2008). Ambas teorías proponen que la diversión causada por el humor de denigración está mediada por el autoensalzamiento; no obstante, la manera en que conceptualiza dicha variable mediadora es distinta. Por un lado, las teorías de superioridad entienden el autoensalzamiento en términos individuales: se mejora la autoestima individual o el sentido personal de triunfo (e.g., Gruner 1997; La Fave et al. 1976/1996, Zillmann, 1983). Por su parte, la TIS pone el

énfasis en el rol positivo de la identidad social positiva; esto es, la persona se siente orgullosa no de sus características individuales, sino sus características compartidas con los miembros de otro grupo. Dicho de otra forma, se mejora la identidad social, y no la identidad personal (Ferguson y Ford, 2008; Turner y Reynolds, 2001).

Además de la teoría psicoanalítica, de las teorías de la superioridad-denigración, y de la TIS, Thomas Ford y sus colaboradores (Ford y Ferguson, 2004; Ford, Richardson, et al., 2015) han desarrollado la teoría de la norma prejuiciosa para entender no solamente los mecanismos que explicarían la diversión producida por el humor de denigración, sino en especial las consecuencias de este tipo de humor sobre las actitudes prejuiciosas. Esta teoría se describe en el siguiente apartado y es un referente teórico de gran importancia para la presente tesis doctoral.

#### **4. Un enfoque integrador: la teoría de la norma prejuiciosa**

De acuerdo a Crandall y Eshleman (2003) los prejuicios no son expresados directamente, sino que son restringidos por creencias, valores y normas sociales que los moderan. Estos prejuicios se expresan cuando las justificaciones (e.g., atribuciones, ideologías) facilitan la expresión de prejuicios, lo que se conoce como modelo de justificación-supresión del prejuicio.

Desde esta perspectiva se propone que las personas expresan el prejuicio después de atravesar un proceso de supresión y justificación. De esta manera, las fuerzas internas —estándares personales, creencias religiosas o ideológicas— y/o externas —normas igualitarias— interactúan al predecir la expresión o supresión del prejuicio. El prejuicio se expresa sólo en contextos donde se considere legítimo hacerlo.

No obstante, cabe destacar que esta justificación-supresión de la expresión del prejuicio hacia un determinado grupo está en constante cambio entre lo que se considera aceptable e inaceptable socialmente (Crandall, Eshleman, y O'Brien, 2002; Pettigrew,

1991). De acuerdo a la teoría de la ventana normativa (ver Figura 4) se establece un modelo de tres ventanas que reflejan las posiciones en las cuales se ubican los grupos sociales de acuerdo al grado de prejuicio hacia ellos (Crandall, Ferguson, y Bahns, 2013).

Los grupos que se ubican en la ventana normativa son objeto de un prejuicio maleable de acuerdo a las normas imperantes, y son por lo tanto muy sensibles a los cambios sociales. La investigación empírica muestra que al parecer los grupos que actualmente se pueden ubicar en esta ventana incluyen a las minorías étnicas y sexuales, y las mujeres y minorías religiosas (Collins, Crandall, y Biernat, 2006; Ferguson y Crandall, 2006).

<i>Tendencia histórica de prejuicio como aceptable</i> → <i>controvertido</i> → <i>Inaceptable</i>		
<b>Prejuicio justificado</b>	<b>Ventana normativa</b>	<b>Prejuicio injustificado</b>
No hay supresión del prejuicio y se acepta su expresión Violadores, terroristas, soldados enemigos, prostitutas, etc...	Afectos ambiguos y cambiantes Inmigrantes, padres/madres gays, mujeres en puestos de poder, personas mayores, etc....	Se considera socialmente inaceptable el prejuicio. Médicos, atletas, mujeres cuidando de sus hijos, etc...
<i>No suprimido</i>	<i>Ambiguo</i>	<i>Inaceptable</i>

**Figura 4. Tolerancia hacia el prejuicio según el modelo de la ventana normativa.**

Basado en Crandall, Ferguson, y Bahns, (2013).

La evidencia sugiere que el humor de denigración promoverá la expresión de prejuicio contra aquellos grupos que ocupan una posición cambiante o ambivalente, mientras que no lo hará para aquellos grupos en los cuales el prejuicio está justificado (Ford et al., 2013).

El modelo de Crandall y Eshleman (2003) ha sido utilizado por Ford y Ferguson (2004) para estudiar los efectos asociados a la exposición al humor de denigración, y en concreto los relacionados con la expresión de prejuicio. De esta forma, Ford y sus colegas (Ford, Boxer, Armstrong, y Edel, 2008; Ford y Ferguson, 2004) desarrollan la Teoría de la

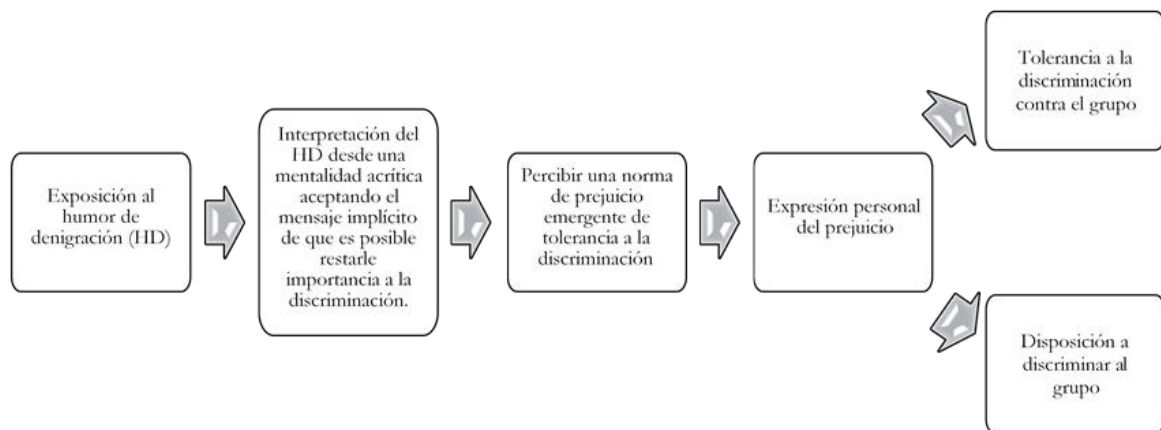
Norma Prejuiciosa (*Prejudiced Norm Theory*) para explicar los efectos que la exposición al humor de denigración puede tener en contextos intergrupales. La hipótesis principal del modelo es que el humor sirve como un facilitador de la expresión y aceptación de los prejuicios, actuando como una justificación — una fuerza externa, siguiendo con la terminología usada en el modelo de Crandall y Eshleman (2003) — que legitima su expresión mediante la adopción de un estado mental de levedad durante la apreciación del humor. En este sentido, las investigaciones muestran que, en lugar de ser una forma de crear o promover los estereotipos o actitudes prejuiciosas, el humor de denigración puede aumentar la tolerancia hacia los actos discriminatorios, especialmente en personas con altos niveles de prejuicio hacia el grupo denigrado (Ford, Richardson, y Petit, 2015; Hodson, MacInnis, y Rush, 2010).

La propuesta teórica, representada en la Figura 5, se fundamenta en cuatro proposiciones. En primera instancia, la teoría propone que el humor activa una regla de levedad en la comunicación, por lo que las reglas lógicas y el sentido común ya no son aplicables para interpretar dicha comunicación. De esta forma, se pasa de un estado mental serio a un procesamiento humorístico acrítico (Attardo, 1993; Berlyne, 1972; Ford, Richardson, et al., 2015). Así, y a diferencia de la comunicación denigrante no humorística, el humor de denigración reduce y trivializa a su objeto comunicando el mensaje implícito de que el prejuicio puede ser tratado en una manera informal y poco crítica (Greenwood y Isbel 2002; Montemurro, 2003; Mutuma et al. 1977).

Segundo, el humor induce a una comprensión compartida de este mensaje implícito solamente para los receptores que así lo aprueben. Es decir, es necesario el cambio a una mentalidad poco crítica para que puede ser aceptada la interpretación humorística (Kane, Suls, y Tedeschi, 1977; Meyer, 2000). Emerson (1969) propone que debe existir un contrato implícito entre quien cuenta el chiste y el receptor, para así poder suspender el



modo usual de entender y pensar los temas tabú o socialmente no aceptados. Al aprobar el humor, el receptor acepta de manera tácita este contrato. De este modo, los receptores que aceptan cambiar a un estado mental poco serio para interpretar el humor de denigración, compartirán el acuerdo de que es aceptable en ese contexto en particular restar importancia a toda referencia a expresiones de discriminación y prejuicio.



**Figura 5. Modelo de la teoría de la norma prejuiciosa: efectos del humor de denigración en personas con prejuicio hacia el grupo denigrado.** Basado en Ford, Richardson y Petit (2015).

Tercero, la teoría propone que las personas interpretan el humor de denigración desde una mentalidad acrítica en la medida en que se tenga prejuicio contra el grupo denigrado. Se ha encontrado evidencia en este sentido, por ejemplo en el caso del género, siendo que las personas con altas actitudes sexistas aprueban en mayor medida el humor de denigración hacia las mujeres (Ford, Wentzel, y Lorion, 2001; LaFrance y Woodzicka, 1998; Thomae y Viki, 2013) o hacia grupo denigrado en el humor (La Fave, McCarthy, y Haddad, 1973; Wicker, Barron, y Willis, 1980).

Por último, debido a que las personas prejuiciosas tienden a interpretar el humor de denigración de manera acrítica, tenderán a percibir su contexto social inmediato más abierto y permisivo a la expresión del prejuicio y se sentirán más cómodas para expresar su propio prejuicio (Ford y Ferguson, 2004). Por consiguiente, este prejuicio se expresará ya

sea como tolerancia hacia la discriminación del grupo denigrado (e.g., Ryan y Kanjorski, 1998) o como disposición a discriminarlo (e.g., Ford, Woodzicka, Triplett, Kochersberger, y Holden, 2013).

En suma, desde este modelo se le atribuye al humor de denigración la capacidad de facilitar la expresión de los prejuicios asociados a un grupo social determinado. A continuación se describen los principales estudios que muestran evidencia empírica sobre los efectos de la exposición al humor de denigración desde la perspectiva de la teoría de la norma prejuiciosa.

## **5. Consecuencias de la exposición al humor de denigración**

A diferencia del lenguaje serio, la comunicación humorística denigrante siempre deja abierta la incógnita sobre su intención. Por ejemplo, si una persona cuenta un chiste denigrante hacia las mujeres, podría no quedar claro si el emisor buscaba realmente denigrar a las mujeres o sólo buscaba divertir a sus interlocutores.

Al mismo tiempo, este tipo de comunicación puede generar debates en torno a lo que se concibe como políticamente correcto y la libertad de expresión. En este sentido, Saper (1995) recuerda como cuando los grupos históricamente en desventaja —las minorías étnicas o las mujeres— comenzaron a censurar el uso del humor de denigración en los espacios laborales y en el discurso público, hubo muchas reacciones en contra de la censura, ya que se percibía como una restricción injustificada de la libertad de expresión.

Esta misma tensión ha dividido a la academia, y una prueba de ello es el extenso debate sostenido en la revista *Humor*, en el cual 19 investigadores reconocidos en el área presentaron sus argumentos al respecto. Este debate fue recopilado y editado por Paul Lewis (1997). Abriendo el debate, Lewis argumentó que las formas denigrantes de humor, tales como el humor sexista o racista, pueden servir para legitimar y perpetuar estereotipos negativos manteniendo la desigualdad social entre los grupos. Por el contrario, en ese

mismo debate se señaló que el humor es inherentemente subversivo y desde esta perspectiva, el valor del humor recae, precisamente, en la rebeldía contra las normas, reglas y toda clase de restricciones, por lo que no debería censurarse. El artículo también recoge otras posiciones que sugieren que el grado de ofensa del humor no solamente depende de su contenido, sino de la forma y el contexto en el que se expresa.

Además de este debate y de muchas investigaciones en torno al tema (Ford, Richardson, y Petit, 2015; Johnson, Neuendorf, y Skalski 2012; Ford, Woodzicka, Triplett, Kochersberger, y Holden, 2013), lo cierto es que pareciera que la sociedad actual ha comenzado a tener una posición más crítica sobre el uso del humor de denigración, al menos en los espacios públicos (Apte, 1985; Barker, 1994; Gray y Ford, 2013).

Tomando como punto de partida la teoría de la norma prejuiciosa (Ford, Richardson, et al., 2015) se presentan a continuación los efectos del humor de denigración tanto para la tolerancia a la discriminación y como para la disposición a discriminar al grupo denigrado.

### **5.1 Expresión del prejuicio y tolerancia a la discriminación del grupo denigrado**

La investigación desde la teoría de la norma prejuiciosa ha sugerido que el humor de denigración crea un contexto para que se expresen de manera más abierta los prejuicios en torno al grupo denigrado. El prejuicio se ha conceptualizado como una actitud individual —ya sea positiva o negativa— hacia los grupos o sus miembros que crea y mantiene relaciones de status jerárquicas entre los grupos (Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick, y Esses, 2010).

Además, en el contexto de las relaciones intergrupales la discriminación tiene una connotación negativa, refiriéndose a un tratamiento inapropiado y potencialmente injusto

hacia las personas por su pertenencia a un grupo determinado (Dovidio et al., 2010). De este modo, la discriminación sería un comportamiento sesgado que abarca no sólo acciones que dañan o ponen en desventaja a otros grupos, sino también aquellas conductas que favorecen injustamente al propio grupo (creando desventaja en los demás).

En este sentido, Bill y Naus (1992) encontraron que percibir incidentes sexuales como divertidos estaba asociado como la tendencia a concebirlos como menos sexistas. Así, se encontró que los participantes hombres consideraron los incidentes sexuales de discriminación inofensivos y aceptables cuando los percibieron como humorísticos; de esta forma, el humor hizo que se toleraran situaciones claras de discriminación y sexismo.

En la misma línea, Ford (2000) encontró que la exposición de personas altas en sexismo hostil a chistes sexistas aumentó la tolerancia a eventos sexistas, en comparación con la exposición a chistes neutrales o a comunicación sexista no humorística. De forma similar, Ford et al. (2001) encontraron que la exposición al humor sexista (frente a humor neutral) facilitó la aceptación de ejemplos de discriminación en contra de la mujer, aunque el efecto se dio fundamentalmente en los hombres altos en sexismo.

Ford, Woodzicka, Triplett, y Kochersberger (2013) también encontraron apoyo a la hipótesis de que los hombres altos en actitudes sexistas expresan creencias que justifican más las diferencias de género después de la exposición a humor sexista que cuando se exponen a humor neutral o a material sexista no humorístico. Además, se ha encontrado que las personas altas en sexismo hostil disfrutaban más del humor sexista que aquellas bajas en sexismo hostil, y están dispuestas en mayor medida a compartir estos chistes con sus amigos (LaFrance y Woodzicka, 1998; Thomas y Esses, 2004).

Además, se ha encontrado que el humor de denigración hacia las mujeres promueve un sentimiento de cohesión grupal en los hombres, justificando las relaciones jerárquicas y la tendencia a estereotipar a las mujeres (e.g., Kehily y Nayak 1997; Lyman 1987); y que

los hombres altos en tendencia al acoso sexual y altos en sexismo hostil enviaron a una mujer más chistes que las denigraran que aquellos bajos en tendencia al acoso sexual (Hunt y Gonsalkorale, 2014; Siebler, Sabelus, y Bohner, 2008).

También se ha observado que el humor de denigración puede contribuir a mantener creencias racistas. Por ejemplo, Ford (1997) mostró que el presentar comedias televisivas en las que se presentara una imagen estereotípica (vs. neutral) de personajes afroamericanos tuvo un efecto sobre la atribución de culpa sobre un incidente. No se encontraron diferencias en la culpa atribuida a las personas blancas en función de que fueran expuestas a una comedia neutral o estereotípica, pero en cambio las atribuciones a la persona afroamericana fueron significativamente mayores en la condición de comedia estereotípica que en la neutral.

Por otro lado, investigaciones recientes muestran que el humor de denigración facilita que las personas expresen su discriminación hacia el grupo denigrado, incluso a un nivel más amplio que el incluido en el contenido del humor (Ford, Richardson, et al., 2015). Por ejemplo, el humor de denigración hacia las mujeres comunica una ideología cultural que justifica la diferencia de género y fortalece un sistema social que trivializa a las mujeres y potencia actitudes sexistas (Ford, Woodzicka, Triplett, y Kochersberger, 2013; Montemurro, 2003). Al examinar los efectos de la exposición a humor de denigración hacia las mujeres sobre la disposición a discriminar en los hombres, Ford et al. (2008) encontraron que este tipo de humor predijo la cantidad que estarían dispuestos a recortar los hombres de un presupuesto de una organización de mujeres.

Los estudios de Romero-Sánchez et al. (2010) y de Thomae y Viki (2013), muestran que los hombres reportaron una mayor proclividad a violar a las mujeres después de la exposición a humor de denigración que cuando fueron expuestos a humor neutral.

Resultados similares ha sido descritos por Ryan y Kanjorski (1998) y por Viki et al. (2007).

En una línea similar, Woodzicka, Mallett, Shelbi, y Pruitt (2015) examinaron en dos estudios la disposición de las personas para confrontar el humor sexista y racista así como también la comunicación de sentimientos sexistas y racistas. Se encontró que los chistes y frases racistas se consideran más ofensivos y más dignos de ser confrontados que las frases sexistas y humor sexista. Es decir, la denigración hacia las mujeres a través del humor se toleró en mayor medida que la denigración étnica, y se consideró innecesaria su confrontación.

Por último, Ford et al. (2013) muestran en sus estudios que los participantes altos en prejuicio hacia los musulmanes fueron más tolerantes ante la discriminación de una persona musulmana después de leer chistes denigrantes hacia ese colectivo que cuando leyeron chistes neutrales o frases anti musulmanas. También se encontró que después de la exposición a humor de denigración, las personas altas en prejuicio aumentaron la discriminación hacia musulmanes y gays pero no hacia terroristas o racistas.

## **5.2 ¿Humor de denigración a nivel endogrupal?**

La investigación en el área pone de manifiesto que los efectos asociados con la exposición al humor de denigración tienen consecuencias sobre la manera en que se percibe a otros grupos sociales, sobre todo en lo relacionado con la expresión de prejuicios existentes y la disposición a discriminar al grupo denigrado. Algunas variables —además de las diferencias individuales— se han resaltado como posibles moderadores de estos efectos tales como las actitudes hacia el grupo denigrado, la posición social del grupo y el status. No obstante, para contextualizar los estudios de la presente tesis doctoral, es importante también preguntarse qué sucede a nivel endogrupal.

La literatura existente sobre humor de denigración que puede interpretarse desde una perspectiva endogrupal es fundamentalmente la que analiza los efectos del humor de denigración hacia las mujeres tanto en receptores hombres como mujeres. Desde este enfoque pueden distinguirse tres aspectos claves. Primero, el grado de identificación con el endogrupo en situaciones en las que se es el target del humor. Segundo, el caso en que el endogrupo sea el emisor del humor en un contexto exogrupal. Y tercero, las consecuencias que puede tener sobre el grupo ser el target del humor.

En el primer caso, respecto a la identificación, algunas investigaciones muestran que el grado de identificación con el grupo interactúa con el sesgo endogrupal; potenciando que aquellos que se identifican en mayor medida con el grupo sean más susceptibles a desarrollar un sesgo de favoritismo endogrupal cuando se ven amenazados, en comparación con las personas con una identificación grupal baja (Doosje, Ellemers, y Spears, 1995).

Desde esta línea, los estudios muestran que tanto las mujeres como los hombres manifiestan un favoritismo endogrupal, al evaluar como más divertidos a los chistes que denigran al otro sexo que a los que denigran al propio (Abrams y Bippus, 2011; Greenwood y Isbell, 2002). También, se ha encontrado que las mujeres percibieron como más divertido el humor sexista en la medida en que se identificaban más con las mujeres como una categoría grupal (Kochersberger, Ford, Woodzicka, Romero-Sanchez, y Carretero-Dios, 2014) y que las mujeres con una identificación alta fruncieron el ceño con mayor frecuencia cuando escucharon chistes sexistas, sugiriendo que experimentaban una experiencia negativa (La France y Woodzicka, 1998).

En el segundo caso, cuando el endogrupo es el emisor del humor, se propone que las personas disfrutan del estímulo humorístico al ser una manera de distinguirse favorablemente al denigrar a otro grupo (Bourhis, Gadfield, Giles, y Tajfel, 1977). En este

sentido, se ha encontrado que el humor de denigración hacia las mujeres emitido por hombres, aumenta la cohesión grupal entre los hombres y la adherencia a las normas del grupo (Angelone, Hirschman, Suniga, Armeij, y Armelie, 2005; Siebler, Sabelus, y Bohner, 2008).

Por último, desde el tercer aspecto, al considerar las consecuencias que tiene sobre el propio endogrupo ser el target del humor, se ha encontrado que las mujeres (pero no los hombres) reportan mayores estados de auto cosificación después de la exposición a videos cómicos sexistas en comparación con videos cómicos neutrales; y que la exposición a humor sexista causa una mayor vigilancia corporal en las mujeres comparado con el humor neutral (Ford, Petit, et al., 2015).

No obstante, existen muy pocos estudios, más allá de los realizados desde el humor de denigración sexista —escasos como señalan Woodzicka y Ford, (2010)— que den cuenta de los efectos que puede tener a nivel endogrupal ser objeto de denigración a través del humor.

## **6. Consideraciones finales**

En este capítulo se ha presentado de manera general qué se entiende por humor de denigración, las principales teorías que lo explican así como las consecuencias asociadas con su exposición.

Se han descrito los mecanismos que formulan las teorías explicativas sobre el proceso de diversión con el humor de denigración, además de proponer la teoría de la identidad social como un aporte para el estudio de los procesos involucrados en los efectos del humor de denigración.

Además, se han desarrollado los planteamientos de la teoría de la norma prejuiciosa como el marco referencial para la presente tesis doctoral, al ser un abordaje potente para



analizar las consecuencias en la expresión de prejuicios y tendencias a discriminar al grupo denigrado en el humor. Al respecto se ha mostrado la creciente evidencia que da cuenta de los efectos de la exposición a este tipo de humor, y algunas de las variables que deberían considerarse para analizarlos, entre ellas el contexto inmediato, las actitudes previas hacia el grupo denigrado y la identificación grupal.

Por último, se ha introducido la discusión sobre los posibles efectos que el humor de denigración podría tener a nivel endogrupal. Al respecto, cabe destacar que hay pocos estudios que den cuenta específicamente de lo que puede ocurrir cuando el endogrupo es el target del humor de denigración. Partiendo de que es una línea de investigación abierta y del interés que motiva, en esta tesis doctoral se enfocan los estudios empíricos sobre las consecuencias de la exposición al humor de denigración considerando tanto el nivel exogrupal (Capítulo 4) como el nivel endogrupal (Capítulo 5). Antes de presentar los capítulos empíricos, a continuación se desarrolla el planteamiento de investigación de la presente tesis doctoral.



# **Capítulo 3**

## **Planteamiento de la investigación**

Chapter 3  
Aims of the research



Humor results when society says you can't scratch certain things in public, but they itch in public.

*Tom Walsh*

Dentro de las relaciones sociales, el humor además de tener la potencialidad de expresar simpatía o solidaridad, tiene la capacidad de orientarse al conflicto, la sátira o la humillación (e.g., Hay, 2000; Martin, 2007). Específicamente, se ha propuesto que el humor de denigración puede servir como un medio para promover la expresión de prejuicio y discriminación (Ford y Ferguson, 2004; Ford, Richardson, y Petit, 2015). A partir de los contenidos desarrollados en la revisión teórica, es posible sostener que los efectos que pueda producir el humor de denigración dependerán en gran medida del grupo target de la denigración, sin olvidar ciertas características de la persona receptora del material humorístico.

La presente tesis doctoral se focaliza principalmente en el papel del humor de denigración sobre los estereotipos en dos condiciones específicas: cuando la denigración humorística se dirige hacia a un exogrupo y cuando ésta se dirige al endogrupo.

Como muestra la evidencia empírica, en ambos casos existen distintas variables que moderan los efectos del humor de denigración. Específicamente, en esta tesis se abordan la pertenencia grupal (Ford, Woodzicka, Triplett, Kochersberger, y Holden, 2013; Hodson, Rush, y Macinnis, 2010), la identificación con el grupo denigrado (Kochersberger, Ford, Woodzicka, Romero-Sanchez, y Carretero-Dios, 2014; Meyer, 2000; Thomae y Pina, 2015) y quien es emisor o fuente del humor (Ford, Johnson, Blevins, y Zepeda, 1999; Ford, 2000; Rouhana, 1996).

Debido a la naturaleza social del humor y al mismo tiempo considerando las posibilidades de investigación, se decidió realizar los estudios con dos grupos sociales reales. El primero personas trabajadoras de alto y bajo poder social y el segundo el colectivo de estudiantes universitarios.

Con el fin de analizar los efectos de la exposición al humor de denigración se tomó como referencia la teoría de la norma prejuiciosa (Ford, Richardson, et al., 2015), así como la teoría de la identidad social (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel y Turner, 1979;).

Teniendo esto en cuenta, el *objetivo principal de la presente tesis doctoral fue estudiar, desde una perspectiva psicosocial, la influencia que el humor de denigración ejerce sobre la visión estereotípica de los grupos.*

Ese objetivo general se concretó en los siguientes objetivos específicos e hipótesis, que guiaron la realización de los seis estudios que conforman la tesis.

El primer objetivo planteado fue explorar los efectos que, en función del poder del receptor del humor, puede tener el humor de denigración sobre subordinados/empleados en la evaluación que se hace del grupo denigrado. Este fue el punto de partida para la realización del **Estudio 1** de esta tesis. En este primer estudio se pretendía generar una batería de estímulos humorísticos (chistes y viñetas gráficas) tanto de humor neutral como de humor de denigración de subordinados). Los chistes denigrantes debían ridiculizar o humillar a los subordinados mientras que los neutrales no tendrían un contenido específico sino que servirían como un control. Se buscaba que los estímulos produjeran el mismo grado de diversión y que se diferenciaron en el grado de rechazo que produjeran. De esta manera se buscó eliminar posibles efectos de la afectividad positiva que generan los chistes (Isen, 2003).

Una vez obtenido este material humorístico, se desarrolló el **Estudio 2** con el fin de explorar qué consecuencias podría tener la exposición al humor de denigración de subordinados sobre la evaluación que se efectúa de éstos, dependiendo del poder de los receptores del humor. Se esperaba un efecto directo del poder ostentado en la evaluación de los subordinados, esto es, que las personas con alto poder (en comparación con las de bajo poder) evaluaran peor a los subordinados al ser expuestos al humor de denigración

sobre éstos. Además, esperábamos un efecto de interacción entre el poder social y el tipo de humor sobre la evaluación a los subordinados.

De acuerdo con la investigación en el área, la exposición al humor de denigración no parece iniciar el prejuicio ni modificar las actitudes individuales, sino más bien crear un entorno que propicia la expresión del prejuicio ya existente hacia el exogrupo denigrado (Ford, Wentzel, y Lorion, 2001; Kochersberger et al., 2014; Ryan y Kanjorski, 1998; Thomae y Viki, 2013). La mayoría de estos estudios han analizado un efecto exogrupal, es decir exponiendo a un grupo a humor que denigra a otro grupo. Las pocas investigaciones que se han realizado en las cuales el target del humor y el receptor eran miembros del mismo grupo han sido aquellas que se han ocupado del humor sexista contra las mujeres. Por lo tanto, el segundo objetivo de la presente tesis fue precisamente explorar las consecuencias que la exposición al humor de denigración podría tener sobre el endogrupo.

Siguiendo esta línea, se diseñó una serie experimental con el fin de contrastar si los efectos del humor observados para el exogrupo se producen de manera similar a un nivel endogrupal. En el **Estudio 3**, se analizaron los efectos diferenciales del humor de denigración frente a un texto denigrante o el humor neutral. Para tal fin, se generó una batería de estímulos humorísticos (chistes y viñetas gráficas) cumpliendo los criterios seguidos en el Estudio 1, y que incluyera las categorías de humor de denigración hacia estudiantes universitarios, así como chistes neutrales y un texto denigrante también hacia los estudiantes universitarios. Se exploraron las cualidades de cada uno, igualando la diversión en los chistes y diferenciando el nivel de rechazo que producen.

Seguidamente, en el **Estudio 4** se exploraron comparativamente los efectos del humor de denigración, el humor neutral y un texto denigrante sobre los estereotipos endogrupales. Se esperaba que el humor de denigración incrementara en mayor medida la

percepción estereotípica endogrupal y que llevara a una peor evaluación del grupo, en comparación con las otras condiciones.

En la misma línea, el **Estudio 5** abordó el tercer objetivo específico de esta tesis, esto es, examinar el rol moderador de la identificación con el endogrupo en los efectos de la exposición al humor de denigración. Concretamente, se esperaba replicar el efecto del humor de denigración sobre los estereotipos endogrupales y además encontrar efectos diferenciales para los altos y bajos en identificación endogrupal.

Por último, el **Estudio 6** se orientó a dar cuenta del cuarto objetivo específico, explorando si el emisor del humor influye sobre los efectos de la exposición al humor de denigración en los estereotipos endogrupales. Para tal fin, se realizó una manipulación del emisor del humor, esperando que los efectos del humor de denigración variaban de acuerdo a ésta.

A continuación se presentan los dos capítulos que contienen los estudios empíricos de esta tesis (Capítulo 4 y 5) y finalmente se retoman los aspectos más importantes en una discusión general contenida en el Capítulo 6.



# **Estudios Empíricos**

Empirical Studies



**Capítulo 4**  
**Poder social y**  
**humor de denigración**

Chapter 4  
Social power and disparaging humor



**The Effects of Social Power and  
Disparagement Humor on the Evaluations of Subordinates**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the effects of social power and disparagement humor on the evaluation of subordinates. According to prejudiced norm theory, it is proposed that the powerful people, compared with the powerless, are more likely to negatively evaluate subordinates when exposed to disparagement humor against subordinates. To test this hypothesis, two studies were conducted. Study 1 ( $N = 116$ ) aimed to analyze and select humorous material (neutral vs. disparagement humor against subordinates) that allowed us to test our hypothesis. Study 2 ( $N = 116$ ) investigated the effect of the exposure to disparagement humor in men who hold or not a power position. Results showed an interaction between power and type of humor: when powerful people were exposed to disparagement humor they evaluated subordinates worse than the powerless, whereas when they were exposed to neutral humor there were no differences between groups. The implications of these results are discussed.

*Keywords:* Disparagement humor, social power, social judgement, stereotypes, subordinates.

### Resumen

En este artículo se examinan los efectos del poder social y el humor de denigración sobre la evaluación de los subordinados. De acuerdo con la teoría de la norma prejuiciosa, se propone que las personas poderosas, en comparación con las menos poderosas, son más proclives a evaluar negativamente a los subordinados cuando son expuestos al humor de denigración en contra de los subordinados. Para corroborar esta hipótesis se realizaron dos estudios. En el Estudio 1 ( $N = 116$ ) se procedió al análisis empírico y selección del material humorístico (neutral vs. de denigración de subordinados) que permitiese poner a prueba las hipótesis de partida. En el Estudio 2 ( $N = 116$ ) se investigó el efecto de la exposición al humor de denigración en hombres que ostentan o no una posición de poder. Los resultados mostraron una interacción entre el poder ostentado y el tipo de humor: cuando las personas poderosas fueron expuestas al humor de denigración mostraron una peor evaluación de los subordinados que las no poderosas; mientras que cuando fueron expuestas al humor neutral no hubo diferencias entre los grupos. Se discuten las implicaciones de estos resultados.

*Palabras Clave:* Humor de denigración, poder social, evaluación social, estereotipos, subordinados



Powerful individuals are motivated to maintain their privileged position (Fiske, 1993; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). As such, powerful individuals are oriented toward goals that enhance the social hierarchy, as self-serving goals (Kipnis, 1976; White, 1959), and use their social perception to legitimate the status quo (S. a. Goodwin, Gubin, Fiske, & Yzerbyt, 2000; Guinote, Willis, & Martellotta, 2010; Rodríguez-Bailon, Moya, & Yzerbyt, 2000). For instance, it has been shown that powerful individuals, compared to the powerless, are more prone to describe others using stereotypes (Fiske, 1993; Rodríguez-Bailón et al., 2000), and to display greater implicit prejudice against minority groups (Guinote et al., 2010; Richeson & Ambady, 2003).

However, although research points out that power-holder tend to describe others negatively (Fiske, 1993; Rodríguez-Bailon et al., 2000), other set of studies have found that power does not necessarily influence the explicit evaluations of others (Chen, Lee-Chai, & Barg, 2001; Guinote et al., 2010; Guinote, 2007a). That is, powerful and powerless individuals do not always differ in the way they deliberately evaluate others. In the present research, we aim to provide one explanation for these apparently inconsistent findings, by maintaining that the lack of effect of power on explicit evaluations may result from powerful participants inhibiting their responses due to social desirability.

It follows then, that if a situation was created wherein participants could freely express prejudice without fear of social punishment, power-holders would therefore evaluate members of subordinate groups more negatively than powerless individuals. We therefore maintain that certain variables when interacting with power, may promote an environment that facilitates the expression of negative evaluations of others. We argue that disparagement humor may serve to establish such situation, acting as a social norm.

Exposure to this type of humor can facilitate a climate that is tolerant of expressions of prejudice, thereby permitting more negative evaluations of less powerful individuals.

### **How Can Humor Create a Prejudiced Norm?**

According to Crandall and Eshleman (2003), prejudices are not directly expressed. Instead, they are restricted by social norms that constrain them. Prejudices reach expression, however, when they are facilitated by justifications (i.e., attributions, ideology, etc.). This is known as the justification-suppression theory of prejudice. As such, people express prejudice following a process of suppression and justification. Internal forces (i.e., personal standards, religious beliefs) and/or external forces (i.e., equality norms) interact to either suppress prejudice or not (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). The result is that prejudice is only expressed in contexts where doing so is deemed legitimate.

Building on the justification-suppression theory, Ford and his colleagues (Ford, Boxer, Armstrong, & Edell, 2008; Ford & Ferguson, 2004) developed a prejudiced norm theory to explain the effects of exposure to disparagement humor in intergroup contexts. Disparagement humor is believed to increase tolerance for discriminatory events, especially among people who already exhibit a high level of prejudice toward the group being disparaged (Hodson, MacInnis, et al., 2010). According to the prejudiced norm theory (Ferguson & Ford, 2008; Ford & Ferguson, 2004) exposure to disparagement humor toward a group brings about a conversational rule of levity that tends to make prejudiced people feel comfortable expressing their prejudice toward that group. One is encouraged to adopt a non-serious mindset when appreciating humor, playing into the “it’s only a joke” prism.

Studies conducted from the perspective of prejudiced norm theory have defined disparagement humor as humor whose objective is to directly, obviously attack some

characteristic of a particular person, group, social status, etc. It also promotes funniness through the disparagement and humiliation of, and disdain toward, the person or group by identifying and emphasizing some difference from the object of disparagement (Ferguson & Ford, 2008; Ford & Ferguson, 2004).

Exposure to disparagement humor may have negative social consequences, both at the individual and macro-social levels (Ford & Ferguson, 2004). It is associated with creating and reinforcing negative stereotypes (Nardi & Stoller, 2008; Viki et al., 2007), and with increased prejudice against different social groups (Ford et al., 2008; La Fave & Mannell, 1976). Exposure to this kind of humor can also contribute to justify racist beliefs (Husband, 1977) or to allow members of dominant groups to maintain their privileged status (Sev'er & Ungar, 1997).

Data derived from applying prejudiced norm theory, however, have yielded contradictory results as to the consequences of disparagement humor exposure. Specifically, the debate lies in what effects are produced by that exposition. In other words, main effects of disparagement humor (e.g., exposure to this type of humor is enough to increase prejudice) have been found in some cases, while in others, only interaction effects between disparagement humor and the attitudes of individuals exposed to it have been found (e.g., exposure to this type of humor increases prejudice only in individuals with certain ideological characteristics).

For instance, Ford, Wentzel, and Lorion (2001) observed a higher tolerance for sexist events (e.g., sexual harassment) after exposure to this type of humor; that is, they found a main effect of disparagement humor on sexism. Conversely, Hodson et al. (2010) hold that increased expressions of prejudice or discrimination do not necessarily occur after one is exposed to this type of humor. From this perspective, disparagement humor exposure only affects people who have a high level of prejudice or stereotypical thinking

toward the disparaged group. For example, Ford et al. (2001) found that exposure to humor that disparages women (compared to neutral humor) facilitated participants' acceptance of discrimination scenarios against women. However, that effect mostly occurred in men with high levels of sexism. Similarly, Romero-Sánchez, Durán, Carretero-Dios, Megías, and Moya (2010) observed that participants who were exposed to sexist humor that was disparaging to women (compared to neutral humor) reported higher levels of rape proclivity. In this case, exposure to sexist humor affects rape proclivity only when aversiveness shown to this type of humor is low. This also reflects the importance, of considering not only responses of funniness toward the humor stimuli, but also of aversiveness (Carretero-Dios, Pérez, & Buela-Casal, 2010; Ruch, 2001).

All in all, prior studies seem to demonstrate that in studying the effects associated with disparagement humor exposure, one must not only differentiate among types of humor, but it must also isolate the relevant attitudes people may hold at the time they are presented with humorous material. In addition, both positive and negative responses (e.g., funniness and aversiveness) toward humor must be taken into account (Carretero-Dios, Pérez, & Buela-Casal, 2009).

Based on what has been said to this point about the effects of disparagement humor exposure on people, we consider that prejudiced norm theory offers an interesting framework from which to study explicit evaluations of people who differ in terms of power. Specifically, this study aims to investigate the effects of social power and exposure to humor that disparages subordinates on their evaluation.

### **The Present Research**

Disparagement humor exposure may increase expression of prejudice and discrimination against the disparaged group, especially when ideological or situational

variables of the joke's audience are taken into account. This article proposes that one such situational variable may be the power held by the individual.

Powerful people live in more privileged surroundings, enjoy more social freedom, and have greater access to resources in the environment than the powerless (Fiske, 1993; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). Thus, given that they obtain greater privileges, individuals in high positions of power or belonging to powerful groups tend to be more motivated to maintain the status quo (Fiske, 1993; Sidanius, Pratto, van Laar, & Levin, 2004; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Willis & Guinote, 2011; Willis & Rodríguez-Bailón, 2010).

The process of forming impressions about others is therefore geared toward information that maintains the existing social structure and pays greater heed to subordinates' negative attributes than their positive ones (Rodríguez-Bailón et al., 2000). Furthermore, relatively powerful people, compared to those less powerful, are more likely to describe others stereotypically (Georgeson & Harris, 2000; Goodwin et al., 2000; Guinote, 2007b; Russell & Fiske, 2010), lean to be more prejudiced toward members of minority groups (Guinote et al., 2010; Richeson & Ambady, 2003), and even perceive less human characteristics in others (Lammers & Stapel, 2011).

To sum up, in the present study we argue that powerful individuals' negative evaluations of others will be more pronounced in the presence of contextual signs that legitimize such evaluations, and that disparagement humor can serve that legitimizing function.

Two studies examined the effects of exposure to humor that disparages subordinates on individuals' evaluations of subordinates, and how this process can lead to the justification of injustices perpetrated against them. In Study 1, a subordinate-disparagement and neutral joke data base was tested and analyzed in terms of funniness and aversiveness. In Study 2 powerful and powerless participants were randomly exposed

to these jokes (disparaging vs. neutral), and then were asked to evaluate subordinate, low power individuals. In addition, it was also expected that the negative evaluation shown by powerful individuals would translate into the justification of several injustices committed against subordinates in workplace scenarios. These scenarios were included to have a second and indirect measure of prejudice against low power individuals.

It is expected that power will affect how individuals evaluate subordinates and justify injustices committed against them (*Hypothesis 1*), and that power's effects will be moderated by disparagement humor exposure (*Hypothesis 2*). Specifically, we predict that powerful individuals (vs. those with no power) exposed to disparagement humor (vs. neutral) will evaluate more negatively subordinates and justify more the injustices committed against them. Finally, we postulate that exposure to humor that disparages subordinates (compared to neutral humor) will also lead people to more negatively evaluate subordinates and to justify injustices committed against them (*Hypothesis 3*).

## Study 1

This study was carried out with the objective of obtaining a subordinate-disparagement and neutral joke data base. In order to do so, we analyzed the metric characteristics of funniness and aversiveness using a battery of items created to assess humor that was either disparaging to subordinates or neutral.

### Method

#### Participants

A total of 116 men aged between 21 and 62 ( $M = 39.35$  years;  $SD = 9.70$ ) participated in this study. These participants were reached in the waiting room of the airport of Granada city, through convenience sampling. Given that, in the majority of

cases, disparagement humor studies have been conducted in men samples (Ford et al., 2001; Romero-Sánchez et al., 2010; Viki et al., 2007), and that several research studies have revealed sex differences in disparagement humor appreciation (for a review, see Carretero-Dios, et al., 2010), we chose to employ an all-male sample. As such, due to the novelty of this research topic and the number of variables, we chose to gain experimental control rather than design complexity.

### **Materials**

*Jokes.* Participants evaluated 30 jokes that had been selected ahead of time by the study's authors using the criterion that they include specific content allowing them to represent humor that was either disparaging to subordinates (15 jokes) or neutral (15 jokes).

A dimensional proposal on humor appreciation requires a distinction between the content of the humorous material (humor without salient content vs. humor with specific salient content), and their structural properties (incongruity-resolution and nonsense; see Carretero-Dios et al. 2010). In incongruity-resolution humor (INC-RES), an incongruity is discovered and then resolved using the information available elsewhere in the joke or cartoon. Although nonsense humor (NON) also has an incongruous punch line, "the punch line may: 1) provide no resolution at all; 2) provide a partial resolution (leaving an essential part of the incongruity unresolved), 3) or actually create new incongruities" (McGhee, Ruch, & Hehl, 1990, p.124). The fact of cross matching the contents – not all the possible ones, only those selected from a theoretical point of view – with the structural properties, is supposed to lead to the operative components of humor appreciation. However, it would be appropriate, as far as possible, to empirically separate the specific content of the humorous material (situation, joke, or cartoon with a predominant content,

for example sexual, eschatological or disparagement humor, and involving a resolved or not resolved incongruity) from the structural properties, that is, from the neutral humor (situation, joke, or cartoon with no predominant content and a structure that leads to perceiving an incongruity that is eventually resolved (INC-RES), or is not resolved (NON). This approach would be very useful to study the individual differences in the appreciation of different humor contents and to explore the effects associated to their exposition.

Building on the specified criteria (Carretero-Dios et al., 2010), each member of the research team independently completed a joke search in the internet. Their jokes were compiled into a common set; and the final set was selected by establishing about which jokes the authors were in unanimous agreement. The criteria for selecting jokes that disparage subordinates were: a) there needed to be both a powerful and a powerless person in the joke, and b) the powerful person had to say or do something to disparage the other. Neutral jokes, on the other hand, were limited to the internal structure of their material (see Carretero-Dios et al., 2009) and were not to refer to any specific, salient content. The items were rated on 2 unipolar 5-point scales for “funniness” (from 0 = not at all funny, to 4 = very funny) and “aversiveness” (from 0 = not at all aversive to 4 = very aversive).

### **Procedure**

Participants were given booklets which they filled out anonymously after providing their informed consent. The evaluation was always conducted in the same context (a waiting room at the airport of Granada city) and by the same person. Participants responded individually and provided written answers.



## Results

First, we applied principal components factor analysis and subsequent varimax rotation of funniness responses elicited by the jokes ( $KMO = 0.87$ ; Bartlett's sphericity test:  $Chi\ squared = 1642.60$ ,  $df = 435$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This revealed two second-order, unique factors clearly corresponding to disparagement humor (eigenvalue of 9.14) and neutral humor, respectively (eigenvalue of 5.58). This explained 49.05% of total variance, while factor loadings ranged from 0.72 to 0.79 for the disparagement humor factor and from 0.57 to 0.78 for the neutral humor factor. Both factors included items with different format (jokes and cartoons) and extension, discarding a factorial solution due to formal more than conceptual aspects. A statistically significant negative correlation  $r(106) = -.304$ ,  $p = .002$  was observed between scores of funniness and aversiveness in the disparagement humor condition.

Next, of the set of available items, five jokes were selected for each factor, making sure there were no statistically significant differences between the two factors' funniness scores (disparagement humor:  $M = 1.66$ ;  $SD = .92$ ; neutral humor:  $M = 1.79$ ;  $SD = .83$ ;  $t(107) = 1.65$ ,  $p = .10$ ). Meanwhile, as expected, statistically significant differences did occur between the two factors' aversiveness scores (disparagement humor:  $M = .88$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ; neutral humor:  $M = .27$ ;  $SD = .60$ ,  $t(110) = 6.97$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Scores on the items selected to comprise the disparagement humor factor yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .83; whereas that value for the neutral humor factor was .76. Appendix A presents the complete list of selected jokes.

## Study 2

This study was geared toward the present research's central objective. That is, analyzing the effects of power and exposure to disparagement humor about subordinates

on individuals' evaluations of subordinates. Moreover, participants' acceptance of injustices perpetrated against subordinates was also assessed.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Design**

This study was conducted in the airport of Granada city through convenience sampling. As in Study 1 (and for the same reasons) the sample was composed only by men. Participants were 116 men aged 24 to 62 years old ( $M= 39.34$ ;  $SD=9.80$ ) who met the condition of having worked for the same company for at least 6 months and that accepted voluntarily to participate. Importantly, only 77 participants completed all the measures included in the present study.

We employed a 2 (Humor: Neutral vs. Disparagement) X 2 (Power: Powerful vs. Powerless) between-groups factorial design.

### **Materials**

*Jokes.* In both experimental conditions (disparagement and neutral humor), five jokes were presented (see Appendix A). Participants were asked to indicate the level of funniness and aversiveness they felt toward the jokes on 2 unipolar 5-point scales for "funniness" (from 0 = not at all funny, to 4 = very funny) and "aversiveness" (from 0 = not at all aversive, to 4 = very aversive).

*Evaluation of Subordinates.* Using the work of Esses and Zanna (1995) as a point of reference, participants were asked to write down three characteristics they think are typical of employees holding jobs with little power and responsibility. They were later asked to return to those characteristics and evaluate each one on a scale from -3 to +3, -3 being an extremely negative characteristic and +3 being an extremely positive one. An

average of the numeric evaluation of these three characteristics was computed for each participant. This average constituted the main measure of this study.

*Injustice Scenarios.* Three injustice scenarios were obtained from a pretest. Originally 10 scenarios were created, each describing a workplace situation in which a supervisor/boss makes some demand of an employee/subordinate. Each of this study's authors independently created a battery of scenarios, which were ultimately compiled into a common set. As for selection criteria, it was decided that each scenario would depict a situation of injustice committed by a superior against a subordinate and that the situation could not be as excessively salient or obvious as to cause a floor effect in participants' answers.

Specifically, participants were presented with the three injustice scenarios, and were asked to indicate how just the situation was using scale from 1 to 7 (totally unjust/totally just). Below there are the scenarios we used:

*1) Pedro requested a day off for vacation ahead of time so that he could go to the beach with friends on an organized trip. There has been a lot of work in recent weeks, and a very important firm has become a new client in the company. His boss is away for his own vacation, but informs Pedro that during his week off, a top executive will be coming from the international firm and it will be his duty to attend to the work sessions. Pedro has to cancel his vacation.*

*2) Alejandro works at a computer company. Recently, his boss started a major consulting firm outside of the company. In order to have free time to dedicate to his firm, the boss decided that Alejandro needs to take several of the functions that previously belonged to him. The boss says that in that way Alejandro will gain more experience.*

*3) Juan is at a dinner party with his friends. His boss called to tell him that they did not planned well the deadline and it is important to finish a report before the next meeting*

*of shareholders. The boss asks him to stop what he is doing and to return to the office because they have to finish the job as soon as possible.*

### **Procedure**

In a waiting room of the airport of Granada city, the person responsible for conducting this research administered booklets to participants and requested that they fill them out. They were told it was an opinion survey about different occupational situations. Participants took approximately 12 minutes to answer to the booklet. After consenting to participate, participants were asked to report their power condition. This information was collected along with other, generic socio-demographic data that were solicited only to mask the true research aim. Power condition was conceptualized as either having or not having other people in charge (for a similar procedure, see Weick & Guinote, 2008). Specifically, participants answered the question “Do you currently hold a position of director or supervisor or of leadership over other employees?” The answer options were: yes or no. Powerful participants were those who answered “yes” to the question, whereas those who answered “no” were considered as powerless individuals. Next, they were asked to assess jokes using the selected items from Study 1. Subsequently they answered to the dependent variables. Booklets corresponding to the two experimental conditions (disparagement humor vs. neutral humor) were randomly distributed to those who agreed to participate in the study. In the disparagement humor condition, 38 participants were powerful and 24 powerless, and in the neutral humor condition 23 participants were powerful and 31 powerless. Finally, participants were thanked for their time and received a brief description of the research.

## Results

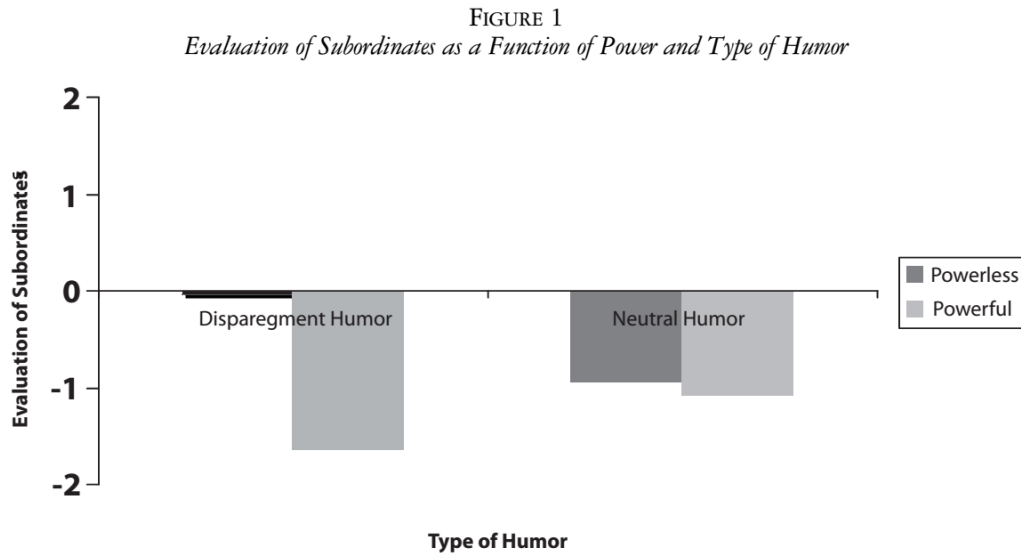
*Preliminary Analyses.* The analysis of variance indicates that disparaging jokes ( $M=1.80; SD=1.12$ ) and neutral jokes ( $M=1.99; SD=.71$ ) were perceived as equally entertaining,  $F(1,114) = 1.15, p=.28, \eta^2=.01$ ). However, disparaging jokes produced significantly more aversiveness ( $M = 1.70; SD =1.29$ ) than the neutral jokes ( $M =.73; SD =.84$ ),  $F(1,111) = 21.96, p= .001, \eta^2= .16$ .

In line with other studies of humor (Carretero-Dios, et al., 2010), a statistically significant negative correlation was observed between scores of funniness and aversiveness in the disparagement humor condition ( $r(59) = -.349, p= .007$ ). No significant correlations occurred in the neutral humor condition ( $r(54) = .032, p= .818$ ).

## Evaluation of Subordinates

To test our hypothesis we carried out an univariate ANOVA with type of humor and power as independent variables, and evaluation of subordinates as the dependent one. As predicted (Hypothesis 1), power was revealed to have a main effect on the evaluation of subordinates,  $F(1, 73) = 5.74, p= .019, \eta^2 =.07$ . Participants that hold positions of power ( $M = -1.42; SD = 1.51$ ) evaluated subordinates more negatively than those who do not hold power in the workplace ( $M = -.56; SD = 1.73$ ). More importantly, as illustrated in Figure 1 and as predicted by Hypothesis 2, an interaction effect between power and type of humor was also observed,  $F(1, 73) = 3.88, p = .052, \eta^2 = .05$ . Hence, when participants were exposed to disparagement humor, powerful individuals evaluated subordinates more negatively than their powerless counterparts did,  $F(1, 37) = 10.22, p = .003, \eta^2 = .21$ . Conversely, when exposed to neutral humor there were no differences between groups,  $F(1, 36) = .08, p = .77, \eta^2 = .00$ . Finally, type of humor (disparaging vs. neutral) did not

have a main effect on the evaluation of subordinates,  $F(1, 73) = .24, p = .626, \eta^2 = .00$ , not confirming Hypothesis 3.



### Injustice Scenarios

A multivariate analysis of variance was performed, in which the variables power and type of humor were included as independent variables, and scores of perceived justice in the three injustice scenarios were included as dependent variable. Applying the Wilks' Lambda test statistic, results yielded a main effect of power on perceived justice,  $F(3, 104) = 5.97, p = .001, \eta^2 = .14$ , as predicted in Hypothesis 1. Results did not show a main effect of type of humor ( $F(3, 104) = 1.24, p = .29, \eta^2 = .03$ ) or an interaction effect between power and type of humor ( $F(3, 104) = .28, p = .83; \eta^2 = .00$ ) on the scenarios' of perceived justice. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 and 3 were not confirmed.

Considering each scenario individually, results revealed a main effect of power on perceived justice only in Scenario 1,  $F(1, 106) = 18.18; p = .001; \eta^2 = .14$ . People who hold positions of power ( $M = 3.87; SD = 1.77$ ) justified this scenario to a greater extent than

those with no power ( $M = 2.54$ ;  $SD = 1.48$ ). No other significant main or interaction effects were found in this or in the other two scenarios.

### **General discussion**

Social power leads people to adopt negative, stereotypical attitudes toward members of minority groups (Fiske, 1993; Georgesen & Harris, 2000; Guinote et al., 2010). The present study examined the way powerful people negatively assess those who hold low power positions and to what extent they justify discrimination against these individuals. Of even greater relevance, this study also investigated the influence that disparagement humor exposure may exert over these effects of power. As anticipated, these data indicate that people that hold positions of power, compared to those who do not, more negatively evaluate subordinates and perceive the injustices perpetrated against them as just. These findings are consistent with the view that people with more power, and greater access to resources, adopt ideologies and beliefs that serve to perpetuate the status quo (Fiske, 1993; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). In Study 2, by more negatively evaluating people in low positions of power, and by justifying the injustices they endure, powerful people help to maintain the status quo. In addition, in Study 2 we examined whether type of humor had a main or an interaction effect on our dependent variables. Results did not bring about a main effect of type of humor (Hypothesis 3). However, an interaction effect between power and type of humor was indeed found (Hypothesis 2). These results suggest that, at least when it comes to subordinate-disparaging humor, humor needs to interact with additional factors (as power) to affect how subordinates are evaluated. These results are consistent with Ford (2000) and Ford et al. (2001) that suggested that disparagement humor is likely to increase tolerance of other instance of discrimination against the targeted group, above and beyond its specific content. The interaction effect described above could

be summed up by saying that when exposed to disparagement humor, powerful participants make lower evaluations of subordinates than powerless ones do; however, when exposed to neutral humor, no significant differences between groups occur. This finding suggests that for male power-holders, exposure to humor that disparages subordinates acts as a sort of social norm that allows prejudiced responses. As such, these results lend support to prejudiced norm theory (Ford et al. 2008; Ford & Ferguson, 2004), which argues that disparagement humor decreases critical information processing, establishing an implicit norm through which “it is permissible” to discriminate against and negatively assess members of the group being disparaged through humor. The results of Study 2 can help to explain why in some studies the effects of power on the explicit evaluation of others are not found (e.g., Guinote, 2007a; Guinote et al., 2010). Given that direct and deliberate measures tend to be influenced by the social desirability participants perceive, it could be that in prior studies powerful individuals have also exhibited greater explicit prejudice, but they have inhibited such response. The present study’s results support this explanation by showing that when, through disparagement humor, a norm is introduced that permits people to negatively evaluate subordinate groups, people who hold positions of power are more inclined to do so than the powerless. It is important to note that while we found a main effect of power on justification of injustices, we did not observe an interaction effect between power and disparagement humor exposure on this variable. These results could suggest that powerful people do not need for a norm to be introduced to justify the injustices perpetrated against powerless people. As such, it could be that the evaluation of subordinates is more constrained by social norms than the acceptance of injustices perpetrated against them. Thus, the former is more affected by disparagement humor than the latter. Further research is needed however to rule out this possible explanation. In addition, the present results could be interpreted according to an



alternative explanation. From the perspective of the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) these results could be explained by in-group bias. It could be therefore argued that powerful people are just showing a preference for their own social group. However, in the neutral condition powerful participants did not evaluate subordinates worse than the powerless. Said otherwise, in the neutral condition powerful participants did not show an ingroup bias. The present research posits that power negatively biases people against others. That being said, more recent approaches have proposed that power does not always have such effects; rather, it simply leads people to focus on their main goals and objectives (Guinote, 2007a; Overbeck & Park, 2001, 2006).

Along those lines, it could be said that when powerful people have goals of equality, or when positive regard for subordinates could have positive outcomes, power will not bias individuals negatively against others. Future research should address this important question. This study has certain limitations worth recognizing. One is that power was not experimentally manipulated (i.e., participants were individuals who hold “actual positions” of power). While this certainly reduces the internal validity of the study, not using psychology students like the majority of studies conducted in this area certainly lends the results increased ecological validity. Future studies should utilize an experimental manipulation to corroborate these results. The second limitation is that in the present research participants were all men. This makes us cautious about the generalizability of the present findings. In the future it will be therefore important to replicate the present results using a women sample. Finally, it is also important to consider that material’s content as well as its format could have produced some type of bias. It would be interesting to analyze what would happen if different disparagement content were used (e.g., disparaging people with the same power condition, employees disparaging their bosses, etc.) or if the material had a different format (i.e., social interaction situations manipulated to elicit

disparagement through humor). It would also be interesting to examine how participants interpret the goal of the joke, and investigate its consequences. For instance, it might be that some participants perceive that disparagement humor jokes against subordinates aim to condemn the abuse of power, rather than supporting it. The consequences of exposure to disparagement humor could be different for these individuals. All in all, this study presents a fresh line of research: the relationship between power and disparagement humor exposure. It constitutes a first step in the study of how disparagement humor can foment negative attitudes aimed at maintaining the status quo and social inequality.

**Appendix A****Neutral Jokes****1.**

- We have a nine-euro menu and another for six euros.
- + What's the difference?
- Three euro.

**2.**

What do a boxer and a telescope have in common?  
They both make you see stars.

**3.**

- Two women chatting:
- I "put" my son glasses.
  - + What an ugly name, right?<sup>1</sup>

**4.**

A little boy tomato and little girl tomato are crossing the street and a car runs over the little boy tomato. The little girl tomato asks:

- What have they done to you?
- + Ketchup.

**5.**

I need to quit caffeine!



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<sup>1</sup> Originally the jokes were in Spanish, when translated the sense is lost. The original intention is to play with the sense of the word "put" ("poner" in Spanish), one woman "puts" glasses on the child while the other understands that glasses is a name she "put" to the kid.

Subordinate Disparaging Jokes

1.



2.



3.



4.



-I present you with my new energy-saving plan,  
Each employee will have to run for at least an hour a day!

5.

A programmer enters the boss's office looking frightened and says:

- Boss, I need to speak with you.
- Come in, tell me what's up- the boss responds.

The programmer answers: You know I've been working for this company 15 years now and I've never gotten a raise. It's time for an increase on the 300 euro per month I've been earning since you hired me.

- And tell me, how much do you want to make? – the boss asks.

The programmer responds: Well, I made some calculations and considering how long it's been and the technical nature of the work I do, I think I deserve to earn 1,500 euro at least.

- Look, I'm going to pay you 5,000 euro a month, I'm going to give you a car, a paid vacation to the destination of your choice, and I'm going to assign you a secretary to help with your daily work. What do you say? – proposed the project leader.

- Are you kidding?- asked the afflicted programmer. To which the project leader answered:

- Yes, but you started it!



# **Capítulo 5**

## **Endogrupo y humor de denigración**

Chapter 5  
Ingroup and disparaging humor





**Joking about ourselves:  
Effects of disparaging humor on ingroup stereotyping**

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### **Abstract**

In four studies, we examined whether ingroup disparaging humor leads to a greater stereotyping of the ingroup. In the first study ( $N=102$ ), we aimed to analyze and select humorous material (neutral vs. disparagement humor against university students) that allowed us to test our hypothesis based in the content of the stimuli. Then, in Study 2, ( $N=101$ ) university students were exposed to: a) ingroup disparaging humor, b) neutral humor or c) ingroup disparaging information. Participants exposed to disparaging humor reported more stereotypic evaluations than those in the neutral humor or disparaging text condition. Study 3 ( $N=167$ ) replicated these findings with humor conditions (disparaging vs. neutral) and showed that ingroup identification moderated the effects of the type of humor. Low identifiers exposed to ingroup disparaging humor (vs. those in the control condition) reported a greater frequency of stereotypic evaluations, whereas high identifiers were not affected with the manipulation. Finally in Study 4 ( $N=153$ ) jokes' source was also manipulated. We replicated the finding of Study 3, but no significant effects were found for joke's source. Findings are discussed in terms of how the manner that humor facilitates outgroup stereotyping can also be found in a similar way in stereotyping of the ingroup.

*Keywords:* disparaging humor, ingroup evaluation, stereotypes, social identity, social identification.



Disparagement humor seems to function as a social communication that allows people to express their negative attitudes. Research has shown that disparaging humor promotes a climate of tolerance for the expression of prejudice and discrimination (Ford & Ferguson, 2004). Exposure to this kind of humor may therefore lead to a greater tolerance of racist and ethnic discrimination (Ford, 1997; Ford, Boxer, Armstrong, & Edel, 2008; Ford, Woodzicka, Triplett, Kochersberger, & Holden, 2013), to a greater acceptance of sexist attitudes (Ford, Wentzel, & Lorion, 2001; Romero-Sánchez, Durán, Carretero-Dios, Megías, & Moya, 2010; Viki, Thomae, Cullen, & Fernandez, 2007), and to a worse evaluation of minority and low power social groups (Argüello, Willis, & Carretero Dios, 2012; Maio, Olson, & Bush, 1997).

Ford and Ferguson (2004) developed the prejudiced norm theory to explain the effects of disparaging humor, that is, the communication that aims a direct and obvious attack on a characteristic of a person or specific group, and its objective is to promote entertainment through denigration, humiliation and contempt (Ferguson & Ford, 2008; Ford & Ferguson, 2004). Building on the justification-suppression model (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003) in which it is argued that prejudices are not expressed directly, but are restricted by both internal (e.g., personal values, standards or religious beliefs) and external forces (e.g., egalitarian standards and social norms), Ford and Ferguson (2004) stated that humor serves as a facilitator of prejudice, acting as a justification that legitimizes its expression by promoting the adoption of a mental state of non-seriousness during humor appreciation (Ford & Ferguson, 2004). Said otherwise, exposure to disparagement humor changes external sources of self-regulation, creating a social setting that encourages the expression of existing prejudice against the targeted group (Ford, Richardson, & Petit, 2015).

However, little is known about how disparaging humor might encourage the expression of negative attitudes and stereotypes towards the ingroup. Although some research has examined perceived aversiveness and funniness of jokes about the gender ingroup (e.g., Abrams and Bippus, 2011; Carretero-Dios, Pérez & Buela-Casal, 2010), it has not been established yet whether disparagement humor could influence how the ingroup is perceived. In this paper we aim to fulfill this gap by examining whether exposure to disparagement humor towards the ingroup leads to greater stereotyping and a worse attitudes toward ingroup.

### **Disparaging Humor and Ingroup Identification**

Social identity theory posits that there is a link between identity and group membership, as well as a tendency towards an ingroup bias (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). From this perspective, individuals would tend to reject jokes in which the ingroup (but not the outgroup) is disparaged. For instance, Abrams and Bippus (2011) conducted a study presenting men and women jokes about their gender and the opposite gender. Results showed that women exhibited ingroup bias by rating jokes about men funnier and more typical than jokes about their own gender. Similarly, Carretero-Dios et al., (2010) showed that males are more amused, as long as it is women who are disparaged and not men.

Individuals might react differently to ingroup's disparagement humor as a function of their social identification (i.e., the degree to which individuals accept and follow group norms; Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 2000; McAuliffe, Jetten, Hornsey & Hogg, 2003). Individuals who strongly identify with the ingroup will be more motivated to protect group's image (Matera, Giannini, Blanco & Smith, 2005), and to affirm their group selves (Spears, Scheepers, Jetten, Doosle & Ellemers, 2004). Likewise, Coull, Yzerbyt, Castano, Paladino, and Leemans, (2001) showed that high identifiers (compare to low identifiers)

devoted more cognitive resources to maintain a positive image of the in-group by trying to solve an inconsistency of information that threatens group image. Conversely, when social identity is threatened, low identifiers may try to distance themselves from the group (Ellemers, Wilke, & Van Knippenberg, 1993).

Building on these notions, it has been found that the less one identifies with a social category, the more amusing they should perceive humor disparaging that social category (McGraw & Warren, 2010). Thus, for low identifiers, who tend to focus more on protecting self rather than group identity (Spears et al., 2004) and who are less willing to invest cognitive resources in solving inconsistent information about the ingroup (Coull et al., 2001), exposure to ingroup's disparagement humor might have the same consequences that outgroup's disparagement humor has; that is, it will create a social setting that encourages the expression of existing stereotypes and prejudice against the ingroup (Ford et al., 2015). However, high identifiers, due to their willingness to protect ingroup's image (Matera et al., 2005), will not be influenced by disparagement humor. Therefore, whereas high identifiers will analyze the information about the ingroup more critically independently of how it is presented (i.e., in a humorous or non-humorous way), low identifiers will tend to accept negative information about it when such information is presented in a way that promotes a non-seriousness mindset (i.e., when it is presented as a joke). For example, women participants were more amused by sexist humor the less they identified with woman as a social category (Kochersberger, Ford, Woodzicka, Romero-Sanchez, & Carretero-Dios, 2014), and highly identified women frowned more when listening to sexist jokes, suggesting that they were experienced negative affect (LaFrance & Woodzicka, 1998).

We tested these ideas in our studies. Given that most studies that have analyzed the effects of disparagement humor towards the ingroup have used gender (Abrams & Bippus,

2011; Ford, 2000; Kochersberger et al., 2014), we decided to expand the study of these phenomena using a different ingroup: university students. Given that in Spain university students are usually stereotyped as lazy, party oriented and disinterested (Puertas, 2003) we explored whether humor in which university students are disparaged would lead to greater ingroup stereotyping, and worse ingroup evaluation and also in which conditions these effects might be stronger. In the first study, specific humorous material disparaging university students was selected. Then in Study 2, we analyzed the impact of disparaging humor compared with neutral humor and a disparagement text control condition on the stereotyping and average evaluation of the ingroup. We expected that individuals exposed to disparaging humor will report greater stereotyping and more negative average evaluation of the ingroup, compared with those exposed to the neutral humor or disparaging text conditions. In Study 3 and 4 we aimed to replicate the results of Study 2 and tested our main prediction: that the effect of disparaging humor would be moderated by group identification. We expect that for low identifiers exposed to disparaging humor, stereotyping will be higher than for low identifiers exposed to neutral humor, whereas for high identifiers no effects of humor type will be observed. In Study 4 we also examined whether the source of the joke can influence the effects of exposure to the ingroup disparaging humor; that is, we investigated whether the jokes told by a member of the ingroup have the same effects than the jokes told by a member of the outgroup (see Ford, 2000).

### **Study 1**

Based on the need to have adequate humorous material, we ran a study involving 102 university students (55 female, 47 male) aged between 18 and 32 years old ( $M = 22.19$ ,  $SD = 3.09$ ). Participants evaluated 32 jokes previously selected by the authors of this work under the criterion that they collect specific content that disparages university



students (17 jokes) or neutral humor (16 jokes). In the disparaging humor condition, all the jokes presented at least one negative stereotype of the group; namely, they portrayed university students as: a) party-oriented, revelers, or frequent alcohol drinkers; b) lazy, devil-may-care, or disinterested. One example of these jokes is: “What’s the last thing a university student does before taking an exam? Take something for the hangover!”<sup>1</sup>

Neutral jokes were defined as those that did not make any reference to specific attributes of an individual or group (see Carretero-Dios et al., 2010). For example: “A waiter to the client: - We have a menu of nine euros and a menu of six euros. + And what’s the difference? - Three euros”. The items were rated on a 2 unipolar 5-point scales for “funniness” (from 0 = “not funny at all”, to 4 = “very funny”) and “aversiveness” (from 0 = “not aversive at all” to 4 = “very aversive”). The jokes used form both conditions are presented in Appendix A.

## Results

In order to select the material, we applied principal components factor analysis and subsequent varimax rotation of funniness responses elicited by the jokes ( $KMO = 0.83$ ; Bartlett’s sphericity test:  $Chi\ squared = 332.09$ ,  $df = 45$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Two clearly differentiated factors emerged: Factor 1 corresponded to disparagement humor (eigenvalue of 2.41) and Factor 2 represented neutral humor (eigenvalue of 2.18). These factors explained the 55.64% of total variance, while factor loadings ranged from 0.49 to 0.80, for the disparagement humor factor, and from 0.53 to 0.87, for the neutral humor factor. Both factors included items with different formats (jokes and cartoons) and extensions, discarding a factorial solution due to formal, rather than conceptual aspects. Five jokes were selected from each humor type, making sure there were no statistically significant differences between the jokes’ funniness scores ( $M_{\text{disparagement humor}}=1.36$ ;  $SD = .90$ ;  $M_{\text{neutral}}$

humor = 1.46;  $SD = .97$ ;  $t_{(101)} = -1.15$ ,  $p = .251$ ). As in other studies (Romero-Sánchez et al., 2010; Weinstein, Hodgins, & Ostvik-White, 2011) statistically significant differences were found between the two factors' aversiveness scores ( $M_{\text{disparagement humor}} = 1.12$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ;  $M_{\text{neutral humor}} = .50$ ;  $SD = .85$ ,  $t_{(99)} = 6.26$ ,  $p < .001$ ). No significant differences by sex or age were found in the funniness or aversiveness scores. Scores on the items selected to comprise the disparagement humor factor yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.73, whereas the same value for the neutral humor factor was 0.80.

For the disparaging humor jokes, the mean value in funniness was 1.36, ranging from .00 to 3.60 ( $SD = .90$ ), whereas for the neutral humor jokes the mean for funniness was 1.46, ranging from .00 to 4.00 ( $SD = .97$ ). These means are similar to those found in other humor studies using disparaging humor (Kochersberger et al., 2014; Romero-Sánchez et al., 2010).

## Study 2

As pointed out by the existing literature, the effects of disparagement humor are not due as much to their prejudiced content as to their humorous format, given that such effects cannot be explained as simple priming effects (Ford et al., 2001). As such, Study 1 was designed to explore the differential effects of humor exposure on ingroup's evaluation and stereotyping. The conditions we used were neutral humor, disparaging humor, and disparaging text, enabling the analysis of differences according to humor type as well as the ability to contrast them with non-humorous disparaging material. We investigated whether participants were more willing to stereotype their ingroup and also whether they will evaluate it more negatively when information about the ingroup comes from disparaging humor. Specifically, we expected that exposure to ingroup-targeted disparaging humor would promote a more stereotypic vision of the ingroup than neutral humor or a disparaging text (Hypothesis 1a). We also expected that in the condition of

exposure to ingroup-targeted disparaging humor, the average evaluation of the ingroup would be worse than in the other two experimental conditions (Hypothesis 1b).

## **Method**

### **Participants and design**

One hundred and one undergraduate students from the University of Granada (49 male and 52 female) participated in this study, aged between 18 and 33 years ( $M = 21.06$ ;  $SD = 3.15$ ). Participation was voluntary. In this study, participants were randomly assigned to one of the three experimental conditions: disparaging humor, neutral humor, and disparaging text (Appendix B). Group stereotyping and evaluation were measured as dependent variables.

### **Materials and measures**

*Jokes.* In each of the humor conditions, five jokes from the Study 1 were presented. Meanwhile, in the disparaging information condition, a text with newspaper format was presented. This text portrayed students with the same stereotypic contents as the disparaging jokes. For each joke and text, the degree of funniness and aversiveness (degree of disparaging for the text) was obtained using the same procedure as in Study 1. The items were rated on two unipolar 5-point scales for “funniness” (from 0 = not at all funny to 4 = very funny) and “aversiveness” (from 0 = not at all aversive to 4 = very aversive).

*Stereotyping and average evaluation.* These two variables were obtained from an open – ended measure based on the work of Esses and Zanna (1995) and used in a previous study on humor (Argüello et al., 2012). This measure has two steps that correspond to our two dependent variables. In the first step, participants were asked to write down four characteristics that they considered typical of university students. Later on –and for analysis purposes– from the total written characteristics, we counted those that related specifically with the stereotypes presented in the disparaging jokes and text. This was the

stereotyping measure, and it was ranged from 0 to 4, corresponding to the number of stereotypes written by each participant (none up to four). Specifically, the stereotypes taken in consideration were the same that were presented in the experiment (in the disparaging humor and text conditions) that is: (a) party-oriented, revelers, or frequent alcohol users, or (b) lazy, devil-may-care, or disinterested. In order to establish what characteristics were and were not stereotypes, external observers classified each attribute as related to the stereotype or not.

Still using the same open-ended measure describe before, the second step was to ask participants to return to those characteristics that they just write before and assess each one on a scale from -3 being “extremely negative” to +3 being “extremely positive”. Afterwards, for each participant we created a mean value corresponding to the average evaluation of the characteristics. This was our second dependent variable, average evaluation, which ranged from -3 to +3.

*Other variables.* Age, gender, and career were registered. Also, for disparaging humor and text, the degree of disparagement and the degree to which the material presented real characteristics of students was measured using a scale from 0 = “not at all” to 4 = “very much”.

### **Procedure**

In the study rooms of University of Granada (UGR) libraries, the person responsible for conducting this research administered booklets to participants and requested them to fill them out. The participants were told that it was an opinion survey about different topics published by the university’s online newspaper. Booklets corresponding to the three experimental conditions (disparagement humor vs. neutral humor vs. disparaging text) were randomly distributed to those who voluntarily agreed to

participate in the study. The average time to fill out the booklets was 10 minutes. Finally, participants were thanked for their time and received a brief description of the research.

## Results

### Preliminary Analysis

As expected, disparaging jokes ( $M = 1.41$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) and neutral jokes ( $M = 1.39$ ,  $SD = .82$ ) were perceived as equally funny  $t_{(64)} = .105$ ,  $p = .916$ . However, disparaging jokes produced significantly more aversiveness ( $M = 1.55$ ;  $SD = 1.56$ ) than the neutral jokes ( $M = .74$ ;  $SD = 1.01$ ),  $t_{(67)} = 2.54$ ,  $p = .014$ . Also, no differences were found in the aversiveness ratings for disparaging text ( $M = 1.79$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) and disparaging humor ( $M = 1.55$ ;  $SD = 1.55$ ;  $t_{(65)} = .68$ ,  $p = .497$ ).

Participants perceived that the text contained more denigration to the students than the disparaging humor ( $M = 6.29$ ;  $SD = 2.14$ ;  $M = 4.85$ ;  $SD = 3.31$ ;  $t_{(67)} = 2.141$ ;  $p = .036$ ). In addition, although disparaging humor and the text presented the same stereotypes (revelers, party-oriented and devil-may-care), students perceived in a greater extent that these characteristics correspond to real features of undergraduates on the condition of text ( $M = 6.74$ ;  $SD = 2.14$ ) than in the disparaging humor condition ( $M = 4.74$ ;  $SD = 2.01$ ;  $t_{(67)} = 4.012$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Also, a negative correlation between the frequency of stereotypes and the average evaluation was found  $r_{(102)} = -.40$ ;  $p < .001$ , which suggests that the better one evaluate one's ingroup, the less one is willing to use stereotypes to describe it.

*Stereotyping.* In order to test if message type can affect the stereotypic vision of the ingroup, a one-way ANOVA was conducted considering the type of message (disparaging humor, neutral humor, and disparaging text) as the independent variable and stereotyping

as the dependent variable. An effect of the type of message was found  $F_{(2,98)} = 8.08$ ;  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .14$ , confirming Hypothesis 1a.



Figure 1: Stereotyping according to type of message condition.

Thereby, the frequency of stereotypes used to describe the ingroup was significantly higher when exposed to disparaging humor ( $M = 1.12$ ;  $SD = .91$ ) than in the disparagement text ( $M = .43$ ,  $SD = .55$ ) or neutral humor ( $M = .65$   $SD = .65$ ) conditions.<sup>2</sup> Post hoc Sidak analyses confirm these differences at  $p < .001$  in both cases.

*Average evaluation.* Another one-way ANOVA was conducted considering the type of message as the independent variable and average evaluation as the dependent variable. This analysis shows no effect of type of message on the average evaluation,  $F < 1$ , *n.s.*, disconfirming Hypothesis 1b.

## Discussion

Our results showed that the exposure to ingroup-targeted disparaging humor facilitates, to a greater extent, the acceptance of the stereotypical characteristics presented in jokes. Therefore, it promotes a more frequent use of negative descriptions of the ingroup. This was not a mere effect of priming negative characteristics that are presented

to the students; instead, it was a reaction to the humorous way in which the stimulus is presented.

However, we did not find an effect of our manipulation on the average evaluation. This could be because participants wrote stereotypic characteristics as a result of humor exposure, but next they realize that they have to evaluate as well these characteristics that describe their ingroup. According to cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), one possible explanation is that participants may have changed their perception of the characteristics to become more positive as a mean of reducing cognitive dissonance associated with evaluating negative characteristics of the ingroup.

In line with previous studies in humorous communication (Ford & Ferguson, 2004) the present study shows how humor releases the expression of stereotypical content, in comparison with the text or neutral humor. The novelty of this study is that it showed that this effect can happen even when the target of disparaging humor is the ingroup.

### **Study 3**

Several studies have shown the importance of analyzing group identification when examining humor effects (LaFrance & Woodzicka, 1998; Romero-Sánchez et al., 2010). Individuals might react differently to ingroup's disparagement humor as a function of their social identification, given that a higher identification leads to a greater willingness to protect group's image (Matera et al., 2005), and to a greater group self-affirmation (Spears et al., 2004). Conversely, low identifiers may try to distance themselves from the group (Ellemers et al., 1993), and will not invest such cognitive resources as high identifiers to maintain a positive group image (Coull et al., 2012). Considering this, a Study 3 was proposed to explore the role of ingroup identification in disparaging humor. We aimed to replicate Study's 2 findings and to test whether the effect of disparaging humor can be

moderated by ingroup identification. In short, in this study we expected that ingroup stereotyping would be higher in the disparaging humor condition than in the neutral humor condition (Hypothesis 1), and that the degree of ingroup identification would moderate this effect of humor on the frequency of stereotypes, that is, whereas for low identifiers disparagement humor would increase ingroup stereotyping (vs. neutral humor), for high identifiers the type of humor manipulation would not have an effect (Hypothesis 2).

## **Method**

### **Participants and design**

One hundred sixty seven UGR undergraduate students (93 female and 74 male) participated in this study. Students were aged between 18 and 29 years ( $M = 21.67$ ;  $SD = 2.59$ ). The design in this study was a two-level independent variable and two dependent variables. The two conditions tested were disparaging humor and neutral humor. The dependent variables were ingroup stereotyping and evaluation.

### **Materials and measures**

The same jokes as in Study 2 were used (five neutral and five disparaging). The disparagement humor factor yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .72 for neutral humor and one of .80 for disparaging humor. Participants were asked to indicate the degree of funniness and aversiveness for each joke.

*Stereotyping and evaluation.* The measure for the dependent variables was the same used in Study 2. The main difference with Study 2 is that, in Study 3, as part of the cover story to reduce suspicion on research purposes, we asked participants to write down and evaluate typical characteristics of other two groups besides students. These groups were concierge staff and professors. The order of evaluation of the groups was counterbalanced.



*Ingroup identification.* Degree of identification with the university students (ingroup) was measured using a scale from 0 = “I do not identify at all” to 10 = “I identify completely”. This measure was presented after the dependent variable, and just before socio demographic information.

*Other variables.* Age, gender, and career were registered. Also, for disparaging humor, the degree of disparagement was measured using a scale from 0 = “not at all” to 4 = “very much”.

### **Procedure**

The procedure was the same used that we used in Study 2. The study was run in UGR libraries, and participation was voluntary. The participants were told that it was an opinion survey about different topics published by the university’s online newspaper. Booklets corresponding to the two experimental conditions (disparagement humor vs. neutral humor) were randomly distributed. The average time to fill out the booklets was 10 minutes. Finally, participants were thanked for their time and received a brief description of the research.

### **Results**

#### **Preliminary analysis**

As expected, jokes in the disparaging humor condition were considered more denigrating than those in the neutral condition ( $M = 3.66$ ;  $SD = 1.72$ ;  $M = 1.80$ ;  $SD = 1.47$ ;  $t_{(165)} = 7.44$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Also, a negative correlation was found in the ratings of funniness and aversiveness in the disparaging humor condition  $r_{(85)} = -.40$ ,  $p < .001$ . This correlation was not observed in the neutral humor condition  $r_{(82)} = -.19$ ,  $p = .086$ .<sup>3</sup>

There were no statistically significant differences between the scores of funniness for disparaging humor:  $M = 1.68$   $SD = .88$ ; and neutral humor:  $M = 1.58$ ;  $SD = .90$ ;  $t_{(165)} =$

72,  $p = .475$ . However, statistically significant differences between aversiveness scores in disparaging and neutral humor were found ( $M = 1.48$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ;  $M = .71$ ;  $SD = .98$ ,  $t_{(165)} = 4.52$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively).<sup>4</sup>

### Main Analyses

In line with Study 2, we ran an independent  $t$ -test considering humor type as independent variables and stereotyping of students as a dependent variable. Results showed that in the disparaging humor condition ( $M = .76$ ;  $SD = .81$ ) participants used more stereotypes to describe the students than in the neutral humor condition ( $M = .39$ ;  $SD = .60$ ;  $t_{(165)} = 3.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Again, we did not find an effect of humor on average evaluation  $F < 1.8$ ,  $n.s.$

*Moderation.* In order to understand if the degree of identification with the ingroup (I) moderates the relation between type of humor (X) and stereotyping (Y), a moderation model was delimited using the macro PROCESS for SPSS developed by Hayes (2013).

As presented in Table 1, the results showed that the effect of disparaging humor on stereotyping was found in the low identifiers but not in the high identifiers.

**Table 1. Results from a Regression Analysis examining the moderation of the effect of type of humor on stereotyping by identification with the ingroup.**

	Coeff.	SE	Stereotyping		
			T	CI 95%	
Intercept	$i_1$ .59	.05	10.77	.48	.70
Type of humor (X')	$b_1$ .39**	.11	3.55	.17	.01
Identif (M')	$b_2$ -.05	.03	-1.46	-.12	.01
Type of humor $\times$ Identif (X'M')	$b_3$ -.14*	.07	-2.12	-.28	-.01
$R^2 = .09$					
$F_{(1,166)} = 5,92$ , $p < .001$					

Note. Identif: Identification with ingroup. \*\*  $p = .005$ ; \*  $p = .035$

Disparagement humor only predicted a higher frequency of stereotypes when there was a low identification with the ingroup,  $b = .63 (.18)$ ,  $t_{(166)} = 3.44$ ,  $p < .001$  (CI 95% = .26, .98), but not when there was a high ingroup identification,  $b = .16 (.14)$ ,  $t_{(166)} = 1.15$ ,  $p = .252$  (CI 95% = -.11, .43). In this sense, Hypothesis 2 was confirmed: identification with the ingroup moderated the effect of type of humor on the frequency of stereotypes.

### **Discussion**

The results of Study 3 replicated the findings of Study 2; that is, disparaging humor has an effect on ingroup's stereotyping (Hypothesis 1). Again, no effects were found for the average evaluation. Consistently with Study 1's results, the measure that was used may provoke a cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), producing participants to change the evaluation once they had wrote the stereotypic characteristics. In further studies, other measure that could remedy this situation should be use.

More important, in this study, we found that ingroup identification moderates the effect of humor on stereotyping (Hypothesis 2). In this sense, lower identification with the ingroup will promote a greater stereotypic accessibility and communication. As other studies reported, we found that ingroup identification leads to changes in humor appreciation and modifies its effects (Kochersberger et al., 2014). Individuals with low ingroup identification are more willing to accept ingroup stereotypes when presented in a humors ways, whereas in high identifiers humor does not have this effect.

### **Study 4**

As we have previously indicated, humor's source, especially if it belong to the ingroup or not, is an important factor in how people react to this humor. In this study we manipulated jokes source in order to analyze if its effects are similar to those found with group identification. Rouhana (1996) showed that female participants were more offended

by sexist jokes when the jokes were told by a man than when the jokes were told by a woman, and Ford (2000, Study 3) showed that joke's source affected the way participants responded to sexist humor. When the jokes were delivered by women or people whose gender was not revealed (vs. delivered by a man) participants high in hostile sexism expressed greater tolerance of the sexist event in comparison to participants low in hostile. Thus, in this study we examined whether the fact that the jokes are told by ingroup or outgroup members could have an effect on ingroup's stereotyping.

We had several hypotheses. As in Study 2 and 3, we predicted the same main effect of type of humor (Hypothesis 1), and the same interaction effect of type of humor and social identification (Hypothesis 2) on stereotyping. We also expected an interaction effect between jokes' source and type of humor; that is, when the source was the ingroup, the effects of type of humor on stereotyping would be stronger than when source was the outgroup (Hypothesis 3).

Considering that in our previous studies disparaging humor influenced stereotyping but not average evaluation, in Study 4 we introduced a different measure of evaluation: the feeling thermometer. As stated before, it is possible that because of the structure of our measure that first asks for a written characteristic and then for an evaluation of it, participants may change their evaluation of the characteristics to reduce cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Thus, in Study 4 we used a feeling thermometer, which has been shown to be both reliable and valid measure of social attitudes (Alwin, 1997; Kinder & Drake, 2009), and explore whether the null effects found in Study 2 and 3 were caused by how ingroup evaluation was measured.

Moreover, we also explored whether the manipulation could influence ingroup's perceptions in term of warm and competence attributes (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). This are the most important dimensions in social

perception, and specifically competence seems central in university students' ingroup identity.

## **Method**

### **Participants and design**

One hundred fifty three UGR undergraduate students (106 female and 49 male) participated in this study. Students were aged between 18 and 30 years ( $M = 21.33$ ;  $SD = 3.11$ ). The design in this study was a 2 humor (disparaging humor vs. neutral humor) X 2 source (ingroup member vs. outgroup member).

### **Materials and measures**

The same jokes as in Studies 2 and 3 were used (five neutral and five disparaging). The disparagement humor factor yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .72 for neutral humor and one of .75 for disparaging humor.

Participants were asked to indicate the degree of funniness and aversiveness for each joke. Four dependent variables were measured in this study: stereotyping, feeling thermometer, competence and warmth, and stereotype score.

*Stereotyping.* Then main measure was the same one used in Study 2 and 3. But in this study, besides asking them to write down four characteristics and their respective evaluation, following Esses and Zanna's (1995) original procedure we asked participants to assess the prevalence of the characteristics listed within the group (in terms of percentages). From this measure, we obtained the two dependent variables described below: (a) Stereotyping: refers only to the number of stereotypes written by participants to characterize the ingroup. The values ranged from 0 to 4; (b) Stereotype score. In order to have a measure that relates stereotypes, evaluation and prevalence of those characteristics, we created from each participant a stereotyping score as used by Esses and Zanna (1995),

that is, by multiplying the value of the characteristics by the percentage, and then dividing this number by the number of characteristics written.

*Feeling thermometer.* Also a feeling thermometer was used as an attitude measure (Alwin, 1997). Participants express the way they feel about students in general, using a scale ranging from 0= “very unfavorable feelings”, to 10= “very favorable feelings”.

*Competence and Warmth perceptions.* A scale based in stereotype content model (Fiske et al., 2002) was used to measure warm and competence attributes for students. Participants were asked, “Generally speaking, in which degree to you think students have the following characteristics...? Eight characteristics that referred to warm and competence were presented. Respondents answered using a scale from 1= “not at all”, to 9= “very much”. Only one factor was consistent ( $\alpha = .66$ ), and because its content (i.e. sloth, disorganization, irresponsible) we call it “low competence”.<sup>5</sup>

*Group Identification.* Measured using the same scale than in the study 3 and presented at the end of the study.

*Other variables.* Age, gender, and career were registered. Also, regarding the jokes, the degree of disparagement was measured using a scale from 0 = “not at all” to 4 = “very much”.

## **Procedure**

We manipulated jokes’ source by making salient who shared the jokes. The booklets contain five jokes (disparaging vs. neutral) that were meant to be shared by a student in a group conversation arguing that they portray the typical student of UGR. In one condition, participants learned that the jokes had been shared by a student of another university doing an internship at UGR (outgroup member), whereas in the other condition the jokes had been shared by a UGR student (ingroup member). In order to confirm that participants read correctly the information about jokes’ source, we had a manipulation

check. Participants were asked to write down who had shared the jokes in each condition. Only participants who answer that question correctly were taken in consideration for the analysis. The 7 participants who did not answer correctly were not included in the sample for this study. The procedure was the same used in Study 2 and 3.

## **Results**

### **Preliminary Analysis**

As expected, jokes in the disparaging humor condition were considered more denigrating than those in the neutral condition ( $M = 4.38$ ;  $SD = 2.73$ ;  $M = 1.22$ ;  $SD = 2.01$ ;  $t_{(151)} = 9.22$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Moreover, there were no statistically significant differences between the scores of funniness for disparaging humor:  $M = 1.62$ ;  $SD = .78$ ; and neutral humor:  $M = 1.83$ ;  $SD = .71$ ;  $t_{(151)} = 1.69$ ,  $p = .10$ . We did find statistically significant differences between aversiveness scores in the disparaging and the neutral humor conditions ( $M = 1.06$ ,  $SD = .86$ ;  $M = .44$ ;  $SD = .55$ ,  $t_{(150)} = 5.32$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively).

### **Main Analyses**

In line with Study 3, a one-way ANOVA was conducted considering the type of humor and source as independent variables and stereotyping as the dependent variable. An effect of the type of humor on stereotyping was found  $F_{(1,151)} = 86.92$ ;  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .36$ , confirming Hypothesis 1. Thereby, in the disparaging humor condition ( $M = 1.68$ ;  $SD = .95$ ) participants used more stereotypes to describe the students than in the neutral humor condition ( $M = .47$ ;  $SD = .68$ ;  $t_{(151)} = 9.08$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Results did not show a main effect of source  $F < 1$ , *n.s.*, nor an interaction effect between type of humor and source,  $F < 1.3$ , *n.s.*; so Hypothesis 3 was not confirmed.

We then conducted three different one-way ANOVAs examining the effects of type of humor and source on three independent variables: stereotypes, the feeling thermometer,

and low competence. We did not find any main or interaction effects in these three analyses,  $F_s < 1$ , *n.s.*

*Moderation.* In order to test Hypothesis 2, the same moderation model used in Study 3 was delimited. As it is shown in Table 2, results yielded an interaction effect of disparaging humor on stereotyping by identification, supporting Hypothesis 2.

**Table 2. Results from a Regression Analysis examining the moderation of the effect of type of humor on stereotyping by identification with the ingroup.**

		Stereotyping Coeff.	SE	T	CI 95%	
Intercept	$i_1$	.96	.06	15.06	.83	1.09
Type of humor ( $X'$ )	$b_1$	1.07*	.13	8.38	.82	1.32
Identif ( $M'$ )	$b_2$	-.08	.03	-2.84	-.14	-.02
Type of humor $\times$ Identif ( $X'M'$ )	$b_3$	-.20**	.06	-3.59	-.31	-.09
		$R^2 = .43$				
		$F_{(1,149)} = 40.79, p < .001$				

Note. Identif: Identification with ingroup. \*  $p < .001$ ; \*\*  $p = .005$

The effect was stronger in those who identify less with the ingroup:  $b = 1.53$  (.17),  $t_{(149)} = 8.67$ ,  $p < .001$  (CI 95% = 1.18, 1.88), than those who had a higher ingroup identification:  $b = .60$  (.19),  $t_{(149)} = 3.27$ ,  $p < .001$  (CI 95% = .24, .98).

Also, a moderation analysis was run using the stereotype score as the dependent variable. No moderation effects of identification were found  $b = 4.09$  (.52),  $t_{(88)} = .62$ ,  $p = .532$  (CI 95% = -8.87, 17.06).

In addition, a moderation analysis was run using the feeling thermometer as the dependent variable. Moderation effects of identification were found again (see Table 3). The effect was significant for low identifiers:  $b = 1.11$  (.37),  $t_{(149)} = 3.00$ ,  $p = .003$  (CI 95% = .38, 1.83), but not for high identifiers:  $b = -.60$  (.39),  $t_{(149)} = -1.55$ ,  $p = .124$  (CI 95% = -1.36, .17).



**Table 3. Results from a Regression Analysis examining the moderation of the effect of type of humor on thermometer by identification with the ingroup.**

		Thermometer Coeff.	SE	T	CI 95%	
Intercept	$i_1$	7.05	.13	53.11	6.79	7.31
Type of humor ( $X'$ )	$b_1$	.25*	.27	.96	-.27	.78
Identif ( $M'$ )	$b_2$	.22	.06	3.75	.10	.33
Type of humor $\times$ Identif ( $X'M'$ )	$b_3$	-.37**	.12	-3.18	-.60	-.14
		$R^2 = .15$				
		$F_{(1,149)} = 8.86, p < .001$				

Note. Identif: Identification with ingroup. \*  $p = .34$ ; \*\*  $p < .001$

Finally, we ran the same moderation analysis using low competence as the dependent variable. No interaction effects were found  $b = -.02$  (.11),  $t_{(149)} = -.21$ ,  $p = .83$  (CI 95% =  $-.25, .21$ ).

## Discussion

In this study we found that the direct effect of humor on stereotyping was replicated, as participants in the disparaging humor condition (vs. in the neutral humor condition) used more stereotypes to describe their ingroup (Hypothesis 1). Also, we replicated the moderation effect found in Study 3, that is, disparagement humor influenced low identifiers, but not high identifiers (Hypothesis 2).

Even though we expected jokes' source to have an impact in humor effects, Hypothesis 3 was not supported. This might be because our jokes' source manipulation was not the best to produce changes in humor appreciation. It is possible that for participants, the difference highlighted in jokes' source (their own university student and another university student) was not enough to activate ingroup against outgroup feelings. Better strategies are recommended to be tested in future research.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, besides the stereotyping measure used in Studies 2 and 3, in Study 4 other measures were analyzed to explore humor effects. The low competence scale did not

report any significant results, nor the stereotypic score. However, we did find an interaction effect of humor on the feeling thermometer by identification. Participants with low identification were more impacted by exposure to disparaging humor, and besides stereotyping, more negative attitudes were reported. This measure, in contrast with average mean (used in Studies 2-3) or stereotype score (used in this study), was able to capture more subtly ingroup negative attitudes. It is possible that for participants it was easier to establish a more independent position on this item, rather than trying to conceal a characteristic and its evaluation and percentage (as it happens with the stereotype score).

### **General Discussion**

Our studies showed that ingroup-targeted disparagement humor can influence the ingroup's stereotyping. Importantly, this result was not due to a priming effect because in Study 2 a disparaging text control condition showed no results in influencing the ingroup's evaluation. This result highlights the effects of the "just joking mindset" that humor communication promotes and may have implications regarding how groups are socially evaluated. In this way, it can be said that exposure to disparaging humor acts as a releaser that allows disinhibition of explicit stereotypic response in the evaluation of one's own group. These results are consistent with other humor research that is based in prejudiced norm theory (Ford et al., 2008; Ford & Ferguson, 2004). From this theory, disparaging humor creates less critical information processing and establishes an implied standard that facilitates discriminating and negative evaluation of the group members through humor.

Another important issue is that, in Study 3, the effect of type of humor on stereotyping was moderated by ingroup identification. According to research done by Matera et al. (2005) the degree of identification affects the way in which stereotypes are perceived. Low identifiers tend to use less cognitive resources to analyze information

(Coull et al., 2001). In this case, less identification facilitated a more relaxed way to receive the humoristic information, perceive and preserve a stereotypic vision of the ingroup. Also, as a consequence of social identity threaten, low identifiers may distance themselves from the group (Ellemers et al., 1993) resulting in more willingness to accept negative stereotypes of the ingroup. Still, more research is needed to address these topics.

Regarding our dependent variables, in the three studies our manipulation affected the number of stereotypes about the ingroup, but in Studies 2-3 it did not affect how it was evaluated. This could be caused by the way evaluation was measured. In a rational way, the group members wanted to preserve a good concept, but the effects of humor had already facilitated the acceptance of a stereotyped vision of the students. What happened could be explained by cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) because when other more independent measure was used (feeling thermometer) the effects on the ingroup evaluation were found. However, the fact that disparaging humor leads to a greater acceptance of the ingroup's stereotype tells us about the great power of disparaging humor. Even though stereotypes can be subjectively positive or negative, they maintain hierarchical status relations between groups (Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick, & Esses, 2010). Exposure to disparaging humor promotes the expression of negative evaluations and prejudice about others (Ford et al., 2015). Our study, in coincidence with sexist humor research, also contributes to show that this effects may also happen in the ingroup stereotyping ( Ford, 2000; Kochersberger et al., 2014; Woodzicka & Ford, 2010). This may contribute to justifying the social hierarchies and inequalities and how people behave accordingly by increasing willingness to discriminate and to tolerate discrimination against the targeted group in humor (Ford et al., 2015).

Regarding humor studies, as far as the authors know, little research has focused on the specific implications of disparagement humor on the evaluation of ingroups. In this

sense, the present work found significant results of the effects of humor exposure on stereotyping. An important contribution of the study is the use of a novel dependent variable. Traditionally, most humor studies used funniness and aversiveness as the main variable to evaluate effects (Ford et al., 2013; Thomae & Pina, 2015; Thomas & Esses, 2004). In this present research, a more direct measure (stereotyping index) was used, bringing other possibilities to research and presenting evidence following the prejudice norm theory,

This study also sheds light about the importance of social identification on the effects of humor appreciation. As mentioned before, the few studies investigating this in an ingroup context are done in sexist humor research (Kochersberger et al., 2014; Romero-Sánchez et al., 2010). Our study moves to another ingroup context, similarly finding these interaction effects of identification in humor exposure. This line of research gives more importance to the humor's recipients, showing that the way she or he is related and identify with the ingroup will act as a filter of the humoristic communication.

Besides corroborating what previous studies said about the prejudice-releasing function of disparaging humor, the present research contributes to establishing other possibilities in the measure of the effects of humor exposure. These results support the idea that disparaging humor has a specific way of communicating cognitive schemas about groups and justifying, to a greater extent, the stereotypes about the group. By doing so, disparaging humor subtly contributes to maintaining social arraignments and, therefore, inequalities.

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**Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> All the jokes were originally in Spanish so their English translation may have not the same sense or any sense at all.

<sup>2</sup> In all of the studies no significant differences by sex or age were found in any of analysis.

<sup>3</sup>As in Study 1, we also found a negative correlation between the frequency of stereotypes used and the average evaluation of students,  $r(167) = -.50; p < .001$ .

<sup>4</sup>As in past studies, we found a negative correlation between the stereotyping and the average evaluation of students,  $r(153) = -.28; p < .001$

<sup>5</sup>We applied principal components factor analysis and subsequent varimax rotation of participants' responses to the eight questions ( $KMO = 0.56$ ; Bartlett's sphericity test:  $Chi\ squared = 135.27, df = 28, p < .001$ ). Three differentiated factors emerged. Factor 1 corresponded to low competence (eigenvalue of 1.85) and contained items related to disorganization and vagrancy (sloth). Factor 2 represented high warmth (eigenvalue of 1.59) related to diversion and warm; and Factor 3 low warmth (eigenvalue of 1.29) with items of shyness and unsociability. A reliability analysis showed that for high warmth the  $\alpha = .18$  with 3 elements, and for low warmth the  $\alpha = .11$  with three elements.

<sup>6</sup> We also ran another study in which we manipulated jokes' source in a different way. In one condition it was said that a university student delivered the jokes, whereas in the other condition a university professor delivered them. That is, we had a 2 (Type of Humor: Neutral vs. Disparagement) X 2 (Source: Professor vs. Student) design ( $N = 151$ ). Then we measured stereotyping. We obtained the same results as in Study 4: although a main effect of type of humor was found, indicating that those in the disparagement humor condition ( $M = 1.13, SD = .85$ ) reported more stereotypes than those in the neutral humor condition ( $M = .73, SD = .74$ ),  $F_{(1,149)} = 9.45; p = .003$ ), we did not find a significant interaction effect of humor and jokes' source on stereotyping  $F_{(1,147)} = .38; p = .540$ .

## Appendix A

### Neutral Jokes

#### 1.

- Tenemos un menú de nueve euros y otro de seis euros.

+ ¿Y qué diferencia hay?

- Tres euros.

- *We have a nine-euro menu and another for six euro.*

+ *What's the difference?*

- *Three euro.*

#### 2.

Dos Señoras charlando:

- ¡Le he puesto a mi hijo gafas!

+ ¡Qué nombre más feo!, ¿no?

*Two women chatting:*

- *I "put" my son glasses.*

+ *What an ugly name, right?*

#### 3.

¿Qué le dice un gusano a otro gusano?

- Me voy a dar una vuelta a la manzana

*What does a worm says to another worm?*

- *I will take a stroll "thru the apple"*

#### 4.

- ¿Cómo está tu hijo pequeño?

+ Hace tres meses que anda.

- ¡Huy!, pues ya debe estar muy lejos.

- *How is your small son?*

+ *His is been working "for" three months.*

- *Wow! He must be very far away*

#### 5.

- Camarero, ¿el pescado viene solo?

+ No, se lo traigo yo

- *Waiter does the fish "come" alone?*

+ *No, I will bring it to you.*

## Disparaging Jokes

1.

-¿Qué es lo último que hace un/a estudiante universitario/a antes de un examen?.....Tomarse algo para la resaca!

-*What's the last thing a university student does before taking an exam? Take something for the hangover!*

2.



- **Estudiante:** Tengo el netbook... mp3 player... pendrive...ipads... y aun así tengo dificultades para hacer ciertos trabajos. Profesor, ¿Qué usaban ustedes en la universidad y que nosotros ahora ya no usamos?

- **Profesor:** ¡La cabeza!

- **Student:** *I have the netbook... mp3 player... pen drive...ipads... and yet I have many difficulties in preparing some assignments Professor, ¿What did you use at university that we do not use now?*

- **Professor:** *The brain!*

3.

Botellón + reflexiones profundas = Estudiante universitario/a brillante

Botellón + conversación sobre serie televisiva = Estudiante universitario/a de buen nivel

Botellón = Estudiante universitario/a común

Tailgate drinking + r Deep thoughts = Brilliant university student

Tailgate drinking + a conversation on TV series = Good level university student

Tailgate drinking = Average university student

4.

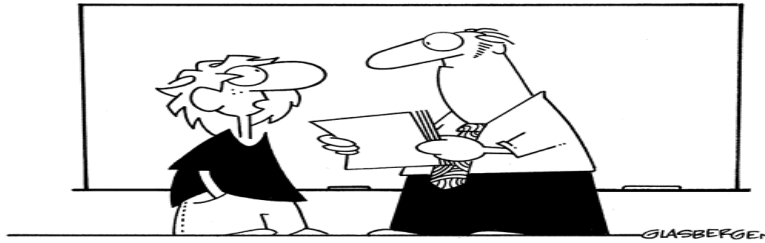
Los tres motivos principales por los que un/a estudiante universitario/a acude a la biblioteca:

1. Ligar
2. Ligar
3. Ligar

*The three main reasons for a university student to go to the library:*

1. *Chat up*
2. *Chat up*
3. *Chat up*

5.



¿Cómo me puede decir que no lo he hecho yo? Fui yo quien lo encontró en eBay, el primero que pujó, el que lo pagó sin dudar, para finalmente imprimirlo con mi propia impresora...

¿How can you say that I did not do it myself? I found it at eBay, I was the first one to bid, I who paid without hesitate and at the end I printed it with my own printer...



## Appendix B

Recientemente, en la página web de la Gaceta Universitaria, se ha publicado un artículo de **reflexión sobre las características del alumnado universitario actual**. A continuación se te presenta un fragmento de dicho artículo. Por favor, **léelo detenidamente** para que luego puedas responder a unas preguntas que te haremos sobre tu opinión acerca del texto.



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### Universitarios actuales

A pesar del desarrollo tecnológico y los avances de la sociedad actual, pareciera que el alumnado universitario le da la espalda a dichos avances, y más bien usan estos recursos para dedicar cada vez menos esfuerzos a conseguir un aprendizaje significativo. Es como si existiera una ley del mínimo esfuerzo, donde se hace lo menos posible para conseguir aprobar, y la reflexión profunda fuera el enemigo a evitar. Se extiende el hábito de reciclar trabajos de aquí y allá, favoreciendo el uso de internet como medio para conseguir trabajos ya hechos, para que simplemente usando el “copiar y pegar” se tenga listo un material de “primera calidad”.

En línea con lo anterior, se observa como el uso de los servicios de biblioteca que oferta la Universidad se ha convertido en una conducta extraña de observar. Más bien, en vez de ir a consultar las extensas fuentes bibliográficas, se extiende entre los universitarios la costumbre de acudir a las bibliotecas como si de un club social se tratase, y donde establecer contactos sociales o incluso ligar fuera el objetivo principal.

Resulta asombroso observar por televisión los macro botellones tan característicos del alumnado universitario actual. De esta forma, la imagen social de este alumnado se muestra asociada al consumo habitual de alcohol, al botellón. Pareciera como si estuviéramos en un momento en el que en la universidad se puede reflexionar, o incluso tener conversaciones culturales (llamémosle a esto hablar sobre la serie de televisión de moda), siempre y cuando se esté de fiesta o de botellón.

Recently, on the website of the University newspaper, an article on the **characteristic of university students has been published**. Next you can see an excerpt from that article. Please read it carefully so that you can then answer some questions regarding your opinion about the text.



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### **Nowadays university students**

Despite the technological development and progress of modern society, it seems that university students give back to these advances, and rather use these resources to devote less and less effort to achieve significant learning. It is as if there were a “law of least effort”, where as little as possible for approval is made, and deep reflections were the enemy to avoid.

The habit of recycling jobs here and there is expanding, as well as favoring the use of internet as a means for work already done, and to simply using the "copy and paste" will have ready material "quality".

In line with the above, it seems that the use of library services offered by the University has become a strange behavior to observe. Instead of going to consult the extensive literature sources, the usual is going to the library like a social club, where social networking or even chat up was the main objective.

It's amazing to watch on television the macro tailgate drinking so characteristic of the university students. Thus, the social image of these students is shown associated with the regular consumption of alcohol, this tailgate drinking. It seems like we were in a time where university students can elaborate thoughts on cultural conversations (call this talking about fashion TV series), as long as they are on vacations or in a party.

# **Capítulo 6**

## **Discusión general**

Chapter 6  
General Discussion



## Discussion

This doctoral dissertation analyzed the consequences of the exposure to disparaging humor on group stereotypes. As shown in Chapters 1 and 2, humor influences the way people communicate and how they establish their relations. Nevertheless, not all the functions of humor are positive, and it is also necessary to take into consideration the possible adverse consequences. Specifically, disparaging humor is likely to reinforce hostility toward the targeted group or its members and also—for people high in prejudice toward the disparaged group—increase the tolerance to discrimination against it (Ford & Ferguson, 2004; Ford, Richardson, & Petit, 2015).

These consequences of disparaging humor are influenced by multiple factors, such as (a) the situation and context where humor takes place (Gray & Ford, 2013), (b) the individuals or groups involved in it (Ford, Woodzicka, Triplett, Kochersberger, & Holden, 2013), and (c) the funniness and the aversiveness produced by the humorous material (Romero-Sánchez, Durán, Carretero-Dios, Megías, & Moya, 2010; Thomae & Viki, 2013).

The overall objective of this dissertation was to explore how exposure to disparaging humor facilitates the expression of stereotypes and negative attitudes toward the disparaged group and how these effects are moderated by group membership, social power of the joke recipient, and identification with the group.

Our results showed that, in general, individuals who are exposed to disparaging humor tend to express to a greater extent stereotypes about the disparaged group. These results are consistent with previous research in which humor serves as a releaser of prejudice—it increases the willingness to discriminate against the targeted group (Ford, Richardson, & Petit, 2015; Ford et al., 2013; Thomae & Pina, 2015).

We performed six studies to explore the effects of humor in intergroup and intragroup situations. Different hypotheses regarding the effects on the stereotyping of the

disparaged group were tested in each of the studies. The first empirical part of the dissertation (Studies 1 and 2) was oriented to analyze these effects when the target of the humor was an outgroup. In this case, we expected that when individuals were exposed to disparaging humor about subordinates (vs. neutral humor), they would evaluate them more negatively. The second part (Studies 3–6) was focused on the within-ingroup effects, that is, whether disparaging humor toward the ingroup also results in a more negative view of one's own ingroup.

In the first set of studies, we proposed that the effects of disparaging humor may be different according to the power hold by the recipient of the joke. In Study 1, we aimed to select humorous material (neutral humor vs. disparaging humor against subordinates). This study was designed to test whether our humorous stimuli were adapted to the specific group that we wanted to contrast the hypothesis with (powerful and powerless), and also, the psychometric characteristics of funniness and aversiveness were taken into account (Carretero-Dios, Pérez, & Buéla-Casal, 2009; Ruch, 2001).

Importantly, we confirmed that the obtained material was perceived by participants as disparaging subordinates. Besides, the material included items with different formats (written jokes and cartoons) and extensions, discarding effects attributed to formal more than conceptual aspects. Also, jokes of both conditions were selected according to funniness and aversiveness mean scores. In this regard, funniness scores of neutral and disparaging humor were similar, and aversiveness scores differed due to the content. This can assure that the only differences in the material were attributable to the disparaging content of the humor and not to experiencing positive affect due to the funniness of the joke (Isen, 2003).

Once the humorous material was ready, in Study 2, we investigated the effect that the exposure to disparagement humor (vs. neutral humor) can have on the evaluation of

subordinates according to the power (high vs. low) hold by the recipient of the jokes. An interaction effect between type of humor and power of the recipient was found on the evaluation of subordinates. When exposed to disparagement humor, powerful recipients made lower evaluations of subordinates than powerless ones did; however, when exposed to neutral humor, no significant differences between groups occurred.

This finding lends support to the prejudiced norm theory (Ford, Boxer, Armstrong & Edel, 2008; Ford & Ferguson, 2004), which argues that disparagement humor decreases critical information processing, establishing an implicit norm through which it is “permissible” to discriminate against and negatively evaluate members of the group being disparaged through humor. These results can be explained by arguing that power holders who are exposed to disparagement humor—but not neutral humor—tend to perceive a norm that allows them to express their prejudice toward subordinates and thereby evaluate them more negatively.

All in all, these studies generated a battery of humorous material with the adequate psychometric proprieties to be used to examine the consequences of exposure to disparaging humor. It was observed that this kind of humor facilitates powerful individuals releasing their prejudice toward the disparaged group by evaluating them in a more negative way.

In a second research line (Studies 3–6), we aimed to explore if the same consequences that were predicted for outgroup disparaging humor could be found when the ingroup is the target. In Study 2 of the first part of studies, we observed the limitation that there was not a non-humorous condition for control purposes. Given the way that this study was designed, the disparagement only occurred in a humorous way, so there was no possibility of comparison with other forms of disparagement messages. In order to remedy this situation, Study 3 was designed to analyze and select specific humorous material that

disparaged an ingroup (students). Besides disparaging humor and neutral humor, we tested a non-humorous disparaging condition—a disparaging text with the denigrating stereotypes of students (and with similar content to the jokes about students) was created following a newspaper short note format. We checked that the funniness scores were similar in the humor conditions, and aversiveness scores differed between neutral and disparaging jokes. Also, no differences were found in the aversiveness ratings for disparaging text and disparaging humor. Additionally, we confirmed that the disparaging material was perceived by students to be disparaging (humor and text).

In Study 4, the effects of disparaging humor were compared to the effects of exposure to disparaging text and neutral humor on ingroup evaluation. Results showed that the frequency of negative stereotypes used to describe the ingroup was significantly higher when participants were exposed to disparaging humor than in the disparaging text or neutral humor conditions. This was not a mere effect of priming negative characteristics that were presented to the students because no effects were observed when exposed to the disparaging text with similar content. Instead, it was a reaction to the humorous way in which the stimulus was presented. Results showed that the exposure to ingroup-targeted disparaging humor facilitates, to a greater extent, the acceptance of the stereotypical characteristics presented in jokes. These results revealed that disparaging humor exposure also affects the ingroup's tolerance of prejudice toward the ingroup, as stated by the prejudiced norm theory.

Study 5 replicated the findings of Study 4 and tested if ingroup identification leads to changes in humor appreciation effects, as previous research has shown (Kochersberger, Ford, Woodzicka, Romero-Sanchez, & Carretero-Dios, 2014; Thomae & Pina, 2015). Results supported these findings, as the level of identification with the ingroup moderated the effects of disparaging humor on ingroup stereotyping. Individuals with low



identification were more willing to tolerate and express ingroup stereotypes when presented in a disparaging humorous (vs. neutral) way, whereas high identifiers were not.

Finally, in Study 6, the jokes' source was manipulated in order to analyze if its effects were similar to those found with group identification (e.g., Ford, 2000; Rouhana, 1996). It was expected that when the jokes' source was an ingroup member, stereotypes would be seen as more acceptable than when it was an outgroup member. Also, in an attempt to use other measures, the feeling thermometer was introduced as another dependent variable. The moderating effect of identification on humor was replicated, both for stereotyping and for the feeling thermometer. Disparagement humor had effects on ingroup stereotyping and attitudes only for low identifiers but not for high identifiers. The jokes' source was not found to have direct or moderating effects.

Overall, these last studies highlighted the role of ingroup-targeted disparagement humor in increasing tolerance of discrimination toward the ingroup. A consistent and replicated direct effect of type of humor on stereotypes was found, pointing out that when exposed to disparaging humor, recipients were more likely to describe their ingroup with negative stereotypes. Additionally, group identification was proved to act as a moderator of the disparaging humor effects, but no jokes' source effect was found in these two studies.

## **Implications**

This dissertation provides empirical evidence of how disparaging humor can foster the expression of prejudice and stereotyping. It contributes to broadening the context and variables proposed to moderate the effects of exposure to disparaging humor in several ways.

First of all, these studies have contributed to extending the applications of the prejudice norm theory to other situations, in this case, the power approach. Previous research had pointed out that high-status members use humor more frequently and that it

can be directed more regularly toward low-status members (Coser, 1960; Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001; Sayre, 2001). Our studies contribute in this line by been of the first to analyze the effects of disparaging humor exposure in the context of the power hold by the recipient and the evaluation of subordinates.

Secondly, in our studies, exposure to disparaging humor affected the stereotyping of the ingroup, and identification played a moderating role. In this regard, they follow the tendency that has been observed with identification and funniness perception of the jokes in the context of sexist humor research (Kochersberger et al., 2014; LaFrance & Woodzicka, 1998), that is, the less the identification the more funnier the jokes are perceived. In our specific case, identification moderates stereotyping, for low identifiers disparaging humor exposure facilitates in a greater extent ingroup stereotyping. Identification with the targeted group is therefore an important variable to consider effects on humor exposure.

Thirdly, the overall findings of this dissertation can be related to perspectives that emphasize the justification function of stereotypes rather than a purely informational function. From this perspective, stereotypes may emerge to rationalize either individual acts of discrimination or discriminatory societal norms differentiating specific kinds of social roles (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Rutland & Brown, 2001). Regardless of the processes through which they are formed, stereotypes are resistant to change (Crandall, Bahns, Warner, & Schaller, 2011). Disparaging humor has a prejudice-releasing function, and as our studies showed, it can also foster stereotyping, serving as a way to justify discrimination and the status quo.

Research has pointed out that humor requires perceivers to accept a less critical mindset to its interpretation and further effects. Nevertheless, studies have shown that when asked to interpret it in a serious way, effects are nullified (Ford, 2000). In this sense,

it is possible that disparaging humor can be used in a critical and reflective way to promote a debate about the stereotypes that society endorses. Humor can express how society perceives members of specific groups and portray them in a discriminatory situation that can serve as a means of debating and challenging the existing order. Following these ideas, humorous interpretation can be used as a strategy to think about and deeply realize how we construct our societies. Practical applications in social intervention regarding prejudice and inequalities can use humor as a way to exemplify stereotypes about groups, and also as a means of questioning that.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Despite the possible contribution of this thesis, we acknowledge some limitations of our studies. First, we should note that the stimuli we used were always written jokes and cartoons. Nevertheless, similar results have been found in studies where the humorous stimuli were not only jokes but videos as well (e.g., Ford, 1997; Ford, et al., 2008).

A second limitation of this work is that humor was not measured in social interaction. All the studies used fictitious situations that included experimental manipulation. This implies a certain lack of realism and limited external validity. Because of this, caution should be applied when generalizing the results to other contexts (e.g., real intergroup situations). Another drawback of this method is that it is not possible to describe situations that include all the aspects and factors present in a real humorous situation. Despite these disadvantages, this research technique has been used satisfactorily in other studies on the effects of disparaging humor because it allows a high degree of control that makes it possible to select the target variables and control for other factors and variables (e.g., Ford, 1997; Ford et al., 2013; Viki, Thomae, Cullen, & Fernandez, 2007).

The third limitation of this work is related to the humorous material. In our studies, we did not differentiate between the content and the structure of the jokes (Ruch & Hehl,

1983; Weber, Ruch, Riemann, Spinath, & Angleitner, 2014). Content characteristics tend to be more salient than structural ones in disparaging humor (Carretero-Dios, 2005); thus, in our studies, we could not address this. Also, even though the scores in funniness were similar to other disparaging humor studies (e.g., Kochersberger et al., 2014; Romero-Sánchez et al., 2010), there were still low ratings. Funnier materials should also be tested in further research.

Finally, it is important to note that these results correspond specifically to the Spanish culture. The university students and men who participated in our studies are part of a shared context that may have differences with other contexts in the way that ridicule and disparagement are presented in a humorous way. Cultural variables should be taken into consideration when analyzing what is funny and to whom, and what is considerate to be politically correct.

Despite the limitations described, we see these weaknesses also as potential opportunities to improve our work. We think that future research should try to address these limitations in order to better understand what happens when disparaging humor is used in social interactions. Other variables need to be taken into consideration, for example, the context in which the joke is told, who tells it, and the relation of the recipient and the target, among others.

Considering the results obtained and the limitations noted, this research suggests several ideas for the design and implementation of new studies in this area.

First, considering that one of the most innovative aspects of this doctoral dissertation was the analysis of the exposure to ingroup disparaging humor, it would be important to consider a replication with different types of ingroups. Also, it would be interesting to address the effects of disparaging humor on other groups toward which society has ambiguous prejudiced attitudes (e.g., disabled or elderly people).

Second, if group identification does moderate the effects of disparaging humor, it would be valuable to analyze which specific components of ingroup identification are related to humor exposure (Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995; Leach et al., 2008). In special, to explore which aspects of identification may be more involve (e.g., centrality, solidarity). Analyzing these aspects can provide further comprehension of exposure to disparaging humor effects on ingroup stereotyping and its implications.

Third, our studies were limited to the expressions of prejudice and stereotypes toward group members. Future research could address the possibility that disparagement humor encourages the expression of beliefs that justify societal inequalities and discrimination on a more general level, for example, analyzing political humor and support of income distribution or immigrant-disparaging humor effects on integration policies. Also, it would be of great interest to understand when a disparaging joke has negative effects and when it does not, specifically regarding private and public spaces and the targeted group or members. This may shed light on the mechanism that underline not only humor exposure effects but also the willingness to share disparaging jokes or to actually initiate them. In short, we consider that the results from the empirical studies of the present dissertation not only contribute to broadening the existing knowledge on this study area but also raise many issues for future research.

Finally, a broader discussion of social aspects of humor is necessary. The use of other methodologies like netnography is important to have a more global and descriptive point of view, also focus groups can be an interesting way to debate in an intergroup context. Furthermore, the analysis of new papers, social networks and social media in general can be a very relevant strategy for exploring of the impact of humor, its participants and audiences and also the political uses of humor.



# **Referencias**

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