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# Humor and Social Support: An Investigation of the Influence of Humor on Evaluations of Supportive Messages

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HUMOR AND SOCIAL SUPPORT: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE  
INFLUENCE OF HUMOR ON EVALUATIONS OF SUPPORTIVE MESSAGES

A thesis submitted to  
the Graduate College of  
Marshall University

in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

in

Communication Studies

by  
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Approved by  
Dr. Cynthia Torppa, Committee Chairperson  
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Marshall University  
July 2013

**DEDICATION**

*For my parents,*

*Rick and Nancy Morgan*

*For their unceasing helpfulness, supportiveness, and sensitivity*

*And*

*Nikolas Payne*

*My best friend, my rock, and my intellectual guide*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DEDICATION.....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES.....</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>VI</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: SUPPORTIVE COMMUNICATION.....</b>	<b>4</b>
THE DUAL-PROCESS MODEL OF SUPPORTIVE COMMUNICATION.....	4
SUPPORTIVE MESSAGES.....	6
Evaluating Supportive Messages.....	7
<b>CHAPTER 3: HUMOR.....</b>	<b>9</b>
HUMOROUS MESSAGES.....	10
AFFILIATIVE HUMOR AND SUPPORTIVE MESSAGES.....	13
<b>CHAPTER 4: METHOD.....</b>	<b>15</b>
PARTICIPANTS.....	15
PROCEDURES.....	15
INSTRUMENTATION.....	16
Scenarios.....	16
Person-Centeredness.....	16
Humor.....	16
Perceived Effectiveness.....	17
<i>Supportiveness</i> .....	17
<i>Helpfulness</i> .....	17
<i>Sensitivity</i> .....	17
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS.....</b>	<b>18</b>
MANIPULATION CHECKS.....	18
Scenarios.....	18
Person-centeredness.....	18
Humor.....	18
HYPOTHESES.....	18
<b>CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>21</b>
LIMITATIONS.....	24
FUTURE RESEARCH.....	26
CONCLUSION.....	27
<b>APPENDIX A: LETTER FROM THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: SCENARIOS AND MESSAGES.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: MEASURES.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>RESUME.....</b>	<b>45</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>TABLE ONE:</b> Mean Ratings of LPC and HPC Supportive Messages as a Function of Evaluations of Helpfulness, Supportiveness and Sensitivity (with Standard Deviations in Parentheses).....	29
<b>TABLE TWO:</b> Mean Ratings of Humorous and Non-humorous Supportive Messages as a Function of Evaluations of Helpfulness, Supportiveness and Sensitivity (with Standard Deviations in Parentheses).....	30
<b>TABLE THREE:</b> Average Evaluations of Supportive Messages as a Function of Humor and Person-Centeredness (with Standard Deviations in Parentheses).....	31

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis study was to discover whether person-centered supportive messages utilizing affiliative humor were more likely to create positive outcomes than supportive messages that did not utilize these strategies. Receiving high quality social support when distressed has been associated with numerous positive outcomes. Research explaining different factors which influence supportive message outcomes can aid both laypersons and practitioners attempting to provide support to distressed individuals. To this end, this examination sought to explore whether the addition of affiliative humor can enhance the effectiveness of supportive messages. Three hypotheses were tested using a 2(scenario: academic, housing) x 2(person-centeredness: low, high) x 2(humor: included, not included) experimental survey design. Participants were first randomly assigned to imagine themselves in one of two distressing scenarios (academic or housing-related). They were then asked to read a message that ostensibly would come from a friend in reaction to the distressing scenario. Participants were then randomly assigned to a message that varied by degree of person-centeredness (low, high) and the inclusion of humor (not included, included). Participants were asked to evaluate the message's perceived helpfulness, supportiveness and sensitivity. Results showed that highly person-centered messages were perceived as more helpful, supportive, and sensitive; however, humor did not enhance these perceptions. To the contrary, in some conditions, humorous messages were rated significantly less helpful and sensitive than their non-humorous counterparts. Further analysis revealed no interactions between person-centeredness and affiliative humor. Implications of the study and directions for future research are discussed.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Jack Handey shared a “deep thought” with the *Saturday Night Live* audience of April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1993: “Dad always thought laughter was the best medicine, which I guess is why several of us died of tuberculosis.” Whereas humor may be unable to ward off infection, it has been linked to positive impacts on physical and psychological health (Frecknall, 1994; Kuiper & Nicholl, 2004; Martin, 2001; Martin & Lefcourt, 1983), and its communicative value has been recognized in a broad spectrum of circumstances ranging from persuasion (Skalski, Tamborini, Glazer & Smith, 2009), to social control (Weinstein, Hodgins & Ostvik-White, 2011), to cathartic release (Weisfeld, 1993). The role of humor in interpersonal communication is also well established (Baxter, 1992; Mettee, Hrelec & Wilkens, 1971; Ziv, 2010), having been consistently shown to reduce interpersonal tension (Lefcourt, 2001), increase attraction and feelings of well-being within a relationship, and strengthen the ties between individuals (Martineau, 1972). Humor has also been identified as a powerful coping device in stressful situations (Bellert, 1989).

Receiving high quality social support when distressed has also been associated with numerous positive outcomes such as improved affect (Burlison, 1994), enhanced coping (Thoits, 1986), greater mental and physical health (Wills & Fegan, 2001), and increased relationship satisfaction (Samter, 1994). From a practical perspective, research explaining different factors which influence supportive message outcomes can aid both laypersons and practitioners attempting to provide support to distressed individuals (Bodie, Burlison, Holmstrom, McCullough, Rack, Hanasono & Rosier, 2011b). In an effort to expand and refine theoretical understanding of supportive communication, the dual-process theory of supportive communication was proposed; this model seeks to identify the features of supportive message

content and processing which are related to positive outcomes (Bodie & Burleson, 2008; Burleson, 2009).

Recent research on supportive communication has sought to better define specific characteristics of the receiver (Bodie et al., 2011a; Bodie et al., 2011b) and the message content (Bodie, Burleson & Jones, 2012) associated with successful supportive outcomes. This thesis seeks to continue this line of inquiry through examining whether certain kinds of humorous messages may be uniquely suited to offer support in a wide variety of situations.

Research which specifically identifies humor as a mechanism of supportive communication and as a tool to enhance supportive messages is limited in social science literature. Bippus (2000) found that humor usage is recognized as a pervasive occurrence in comforting episodes and that well-timed, funny, and intentional humor increased empowerment in receivers of supportive messages. She ultimately asserted that in terms of its ability to facilitate emotion-focused coping, humor may be preferable to non-humorous communication when it is funny, relevant, and demonstrates consciousness of the receiver's perspective. Other research has investigated the application of humor in stressful situations (Mawhinney, 2008; Oliff, Ogradniczuk, Bottorff, Hislop & Halpin, 2009); however, additional research is necessary to identify the relationship between humor and social support. This thesis explores the proposition that supportive messages utilizing affiliative humor are uniquely capable of encouraging positive supportive communication outcomes because of the theoretical similarities between the functions of affiliative humor and the characteristics of high-quality social support. This proposition is based on the observation that affiliative humor creates affiliation, expresses feelings, and broadens perspective. These elements correspond with established elements of successful supportive messages which help the distressed other to acknowledge, elaborate upon,

and explore his or her feelings. Therefore, based on our theoretical understanding of affiliative humor and successful supportive messages, affiliative humor may be a valuable tool in the conception and design of supportive messages.

## CHAPTER 2

### SUPPORTIVE COMMUNICATION

Receiving emotional support from family and friends is one of the most important resources available to individuals experiencing stress and emotional turmoil (Jones, 2004; Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002; Cutrona & Russell, 1990). In the context of communication, Burleson (2003) defines emotional support as the “specific lines of communicative behavior enacted by one party with the intent of helping another cope effectively with emotional distress” (p. 552).

Communication theorists have sought to identify the characteristics of supportive communication which best help the recipients of supportive messages and have identified several characteristics of message content and processing which may maximize supportive success. The dual-process model of supportive communication (Bodie & Burleson, 2008; Burleson 2009) is well suited to explain supportive interactions as it discusses both message content as well as variables which influence processing. The present investigation seeks to explore the role of humor in the content of supportive messages; however, to best create these messages it is necessary to understand the complex nature of supportive communication in general. The dual-process model of supportive communication (Bodie & Burleson, 2008; Burleson, 2009) offers an accessible guiding framework of our present knowledge of supportive communication and how researchers may maximize positive outcomes.

#### **The Dual-Process Model of Supportive Communication**

Until recently, dual-process models of message outcomes were almost exclusively applied to persuasive communication. Petty and Cacioppo’s (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Chaiken’s (1980) Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) are the most well represented in the literature (Burleson, 2009), and both models assert that the ultimate evaluation

and outcome of a message is mediated by the content of the message, as well as the relative sophistication with which the receiver processes the message. The ELM and the HSM share the basic proposition that message content has the most powerful impact on processing-related outcomes when that content is scrutinized with a high degree of sophistication (Chaiken, 1980; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Whereas the fundamental logic of dual-process models of persuasive messages is complementary to the study of supportive communication, the desired message outcomes of persuasive and supportive communication (attitude vs. affect change) differ substantially. The mechanisms which influence these outcomes, the content of the messages, and the interactional environment in which the exchange takes place also differ (Bodie et al., 2011a). These differences warranted an adapted processing theory consistent with the nature of supportive communication; Bodie and Burleson (2008) and Burleson's (2009) dual-process model of supportive communication provide needed theoretical insight.

The dual-process model of supportive communication identifies three aspects of well-being which characterize successful supportive communication evaluations and outcomes: cognitions, affects, and behaviors (Burleson, 2009). Cognitions which are associated with successful support help an individual to hold more positive beliefs about the stressful situation, make helpful attributions about the nature or cause of their circumstances, and improve appraisals of their situation as it relates to their well-being. Changes in affect that are associated with a successful supportive interaction may also lead the receiver of the message to experience more positive emotions and moods, which in turn can lead to a change in behavior such that the receiver of the message employs coping strategies that help him or her deal effectively with events which caused their distress.

The core thesis of the dual-process model of supportive communication is that elements of supportive exchanges impact the outcome of the interaction as a joint function of the properties of these elements (relative sophistication of the message) and how these elements are processed by recipients (systematically or superficially; Burleson, 2009). Variations in the relative quality of supportive message content become increasingly significant when the messages receive greater scrutiny from recipients; however, when messages do not receive such scrutiny, the quality of the message impacts supportive outcomes to a lesser extent (Bodie et al., 2011a). These factors (message and processing) ultimately determine the receiver's evaluation of the message. By identifying key areas of importance in the supportive communication process, the dual-process model of supportive communication provides a conceptual framework from which researchers may approach the task of testing variables which may improve the effectiveness of supportive messages. Whereas affiliative humor may enhance message processing, the present investigation focuses on the enhancement of supportive message content.

### **Supportive Messages**

Burleson (1994) argued that the sophistication of supportive message content is determined by the degree to which the content: (a) encourages the recipient to elaborate on their feelings and circumstances, (b) recognizes the validity of the receiver's feelings (signaling that they are cared about), and (c) motivates the recipient to direct their attention to the situation at hand. The construct of verbal person-centeredness (VPC) conceptualizes these message qualities. VPC is the degree to which messages explicitly acknowledge, elaborate upon, legitimize, and contextualize the feelings and perspective of a distressed other. Messages with low person-centeredness (LPC) overlook or discount the receiver's feelings and perspectives by criticizing them or suggesting how he or she *should* feel about or perceive the situation. Moderately person-

centered (MPC) messages recognize and address the distressed individuals' feelings superficially by attempting to distract them, offering expressions of sympathy or suggesting a new explanation for the matter at hand. High person-centered (HPC) messages explicitly recognize and legitimize the other's feelings by helping them to articulate those feelings, elaborate reasons why they are present, and explore how those emotions fit within a broader context (Bodie et al., 2011a).

Substantial evidence demonstrates that HPC messages are significantly more effective at improving receiver affect than MPC or LPC messages (Bodie et al., 2012; Burleson et al., 2005).

**Evaluating supportive messages.** In their efforts to develop a self-report measure of evaluations of social support, Goldsmith, McDermott and Alexander (2000) sought to better define three dimensions of evaluation which are consistently associated with positive supportive outcomes: helpfulness, supportiveness, and sensitivity. In light of Goldsmith and McDermott's (1997) review of research on evaluations of social support, Goldsmith, McDermott and Alexander (2000) argued that the popular use of global measures of support (measuring the relative "goodness" or "badness" of a message) ignored the multiple dimensions through which support may influence situational outcomes (such as uncertainty reduction, increased self-esteem or reappraisal.) Over a series of studies, the researchers compiled nearly 2000 "idea units" used to describe supportive interactions and condensed them into twelve adjectives consistently used to describe positive supportive outcomes. Four adjectives characterized each of the broader classifications of helpful, supportive, and sensitive. Helpfulness was associated with instrumental or practical assistance or with helping to clarify the recipients' thoughts. Messages seeking to maximize helpfulness or problem-solving utility should demonstrate knowledge of the situation and should show generosity in the willingness to give of oneself to aid the other. Supportiveness connoted a sense of relational assurance and encouragement. Messages seeking to maximize

supportiveness must incorporate reassurance, encouragement, and the desire to comfort the other. Sensitivity was related to emotional experiences and outcomes and to the empathy of the sender of social support. Messages seeking to maximize sensitivity must demonstrate emotional awareness through compassion. These dimensions appear to align with Burleson's (2009) characteristics of positive supportive communication outcomes as helpfulness motivates the recipient to direct their attention to the situation at hand, supportiveness recognizes the validity of the receiver's feelings and indicates they are cared about, and sensitivity encourages elaboration on feelings and circumstances. To test the relationship between these constructs and messages previously determined to represent high and low levels of person-centeredness, it was hypothesized that:

*H1: There will be a main effect for person-centeredness, such that supportive messages high in person-centeredness will be considered more effective than supportive messages low in person-centeredness.*

*H1a) Supportive messages high in person-centeredness will be rated as more helpful than supportive messages low in person-centeredness.*

*H1b) Supportive messages high in person-centeredness will be rated as more supportive than supportive messages low in person-centeredness.*

*H1c) Supportive messages high in person-centeredness will be rated as more sensitive than supportive messages low in person-centeredness.*

## CHAPTER THREE

### HUMOR

The potential impact that message content may have on supportive outcomes is mediated by a variety of factors which effect message processing. The influence of humor on one's motivation and ability to process and apply supportive messages is a topic rife for study. A central goal of the dual-process model of supportive communication is to identify the mechanisms which influence cognitions, affect, and behaviors; therefore, the role of humor, and in particular affiliative humor, in the supportive communication process is particularly worthy of investigation. To understand the role of humor in supportive communication, it is important to understand the nature of humor itself. Defined as, "verbal and/or nonverbal messages that contain incongruous elements, playfully enacted" (Oring, 1992; as cited in Miczo, Averbek & Mariani, 2009, p. 444), "an intended or unintended message interpreted as funny" (Lynch, 2002, p. 423), and "reasoning gone mad" (Marx, 1991, p. 83), there is no all-encompassing definition of humor (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992). For the purposes of this study, Oring's (1992) definition of humor as any message (intentional or unintentional) which another finds comical provides the broadest conceptualization which can be applied to supportive messages. To gain a richer understanding of the nuances of humor, it is valuable to first consider its relationship to play.

Miller (1973) defined play as an activity or behavior performed for its own sake. Play is a means to an end as well as an end itself. Most commonly associated with young children's exploratory pastimes, play requires stepping out of one's normal perception of reality and accepting a new reality where different rules apply. Miller argued that, whereas play does hold value as a mechanism for learning, the true significance of play is how it strengthens one's ability to generate alternative and novel methods of interpreting the world. The increased

cognitive flexibility and social risk-taking which play encourages exemplifies the relationship between play and humor, as well as the potential role of humor in social support. Previous humor research has focused on the utility of humor as a means of persuasion; however many of these findings are valuable to the investigation of humor in social support. First, humor has been consistently shown to increase recipients' attention to messages (Powell & Andresen, 1985) although this effect is even greater when the humor is directly related to topic or subject of the message (Madden, 1982). Second, humor has been shown to increase perceptions of trustworthiness (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992) and liking of the source (Sternthal & Craig, 1973) of the message. Finally, playful or humorous communication is a central quality of intimate relationships (Baxter, 1992); therefore, the close relational nature of most supportive interactions may foster the use of humorous communication within these interactions.

### **Humorous Messages**

To best incorporate humor in supportive messages it is necessary to gain insight on current theoretical understandings of deliberately produced humorous messages (Miczo & Welter, 2006). The nature of the relational messages communicated through humor can be understood on a continuum between affiliative and aggressive humor. The fundamental qualities of affiliative humor include integration, equality, and inclusion. Defined as humor that is intended to elicit laughter or amusement from the target of the humorous message (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991), affiliative humor functions to reduce tension and conflict (Ziv, 1984), garner social support (Lefcourt, 2001) and improve perspective on life's problems (Hyers, 1996). Individuals high in affiliative humor tend to say funny things, tell jokes, and incorporate humor into everyday conversations as a means to facilitate relationships and reduce interpersonal tension (Lefcourt, 2001). Drawing upon the previous discussion of the

qualities of supportive messages which lead to successful outcomes, there is a noticeable parallel between these qualities and the characteristics of affiliative humor. Characterized by expressing feelings, creating affiliation, gaining perspective, and coping with stress (Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray & Weir, 2003; Miczo, 2004), affiliative humor aligns well with Burleson's (1982) multi-level conception of person-centeredness, which identifies that optimally successful supportive messages help the distressed other to acknowledge, elaborate upon, and explore their feelings.

Researchers in the field of advertising have identified seven "types" of humor which may be considered when generating supportive messages: comparison, personification, exaggeration, pun, sarcasm, silliness and surprise (Rieck, 1997; Catanescu & Tom, 2001). Comparison humor is the combining of incongruous elements to create an unexpected situation. Personification is the application of human characteristics to nonhuman entities. Exaggeration involves overstating or magnifying one or more elements of a scenario. Puns use elements of language to generate novel or unexpected meanings to humorous effect. Sarcasm is classified as the use of blatantly ironic circumstances or responses. Silliness is the use of ludicrous, irregular, or fanciful elements, and surprise is defined as unexpected situations from which humor arises. Although these classifications may overlap in certain contexts, conceiving of humor in this way is valuable when incorporating humor into the design of supportive messages as it clearly outlines what strategies may be used to implement humor in a message. Because of the nebulous nature of humor, distinct classifications of different approaches to humor creation are of practical value to humor research. For this thesis, sarcasm, puns, and exaggeration were included in the messages, as they were perceived to be the most affiliative in nature.

This thesis proposes to measure the effectiveness of supportive messages through perceptions of the message's helpfulness, supportiveness, and sensitivity—constructs consistently used in the study of supportive messages—which align with many characteristics of affiliative humor. Helpfulness is exemplified by affiliative humor as it encourages reevaluation of one's circumstances. Research indicates that optimal supportive messages direct the recipient's attention to the situation at hand rather than attempting to distract them. Thus, encouraging the distressed other to revisit the various factors which led to their distress can be considered a helpful function of affiliative humor. Supportiveness is exemplified by affiliative humor as it leads to increased intimacy between the sender and receiver of the message. Reinforcing these bonds through humor may increase feelings of trust and liking between the sender and receiver, rendering the message more supportive. Sensitivity is exemplified by affiliative humor as affiliative humor aids in the expression of emotions. Comfort in expressing emotions is paramount to the supportive communication process and humor may make this type of self-disclosure more comfortable by diffusing tension and reinforcing the relationship between sender and receiver. It is therefore proposed that affiliative humor may be a valuable addition to supportive messages. To test the assertion that affiliative humor enhances the effectiveness of supportive messages, it is hypothesized that:

*H2: There will be a main effect for supportive messages utilizing affiliative humor, such that they will be considered more effective than supportive messages which do not contain humor.*

*H2a) Supportive messages utilizing affiliative humor will be rated as more helpful than supportive messages that do not contain humor.*

*H2b) Supportive messages utilizing affiliative humor will be rated as more supportive than supportive messages that do not contain humor.*

*H2c) Supportive messages utilizing affiliative humor will be rated as more sensitive than supportive messages that do not contain humor.*

### **Affiliative Humor and Person-centeredness**

The theoretically defined goals of HPC messages are to 1) explicitly recognize and legitimize the other's feelings by helping them to articulate those feelings, 2) elaborate reasons why they are present, and 3) explore how those emotions fit within a broader context (Bodie et al., 2011a). These goals may be achieved by the characteristics of affiliative humor which have been shown to aid in creating affiliation, expressing feelings, and gaining perspective (Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray & Weir, 2003; Miczo, 2004). Creating affiliation may enhance a message's ability to recognize and legitimize the other's feelings by helping them articulate those feelings because individuals are generally more comfortable talking about their feelings with a person they feel close to (Meeks, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1998). Expressing feelings may help in elaborating on the reasons for those feelings because it is often necessary to access and express emotion before one is able to rationally analyze the origin of and influences on what is felt (Wood, 2013). Affiliative humor can encourage catharsis (Oring, 1992; Weisfeld, 1993). Gaining perspective may help one explore his or her emotions in context because, to gain perspective, is to better recognize the broader variables and circumstances which influence a given situation. It is therefore predicted that messages perceived to be most helpful, supportive, and sensitive are both highly person-centered and contain affiliative humor.

*H3: There will be an interaction between person-centeredness and affiliative humor, such that supportive messages high in person-centeredness (HPC) and affiliative humor will be considered the most effective supportive messages.*

*H3a) HPC supportive messages that include affiliative humor will be rated more helpful than HPC messages that do not contain affiliative humor, LPC supportive messages that contain affiliative humor, and LPC supportive messages that do not contain affiliative humor.*

*H3b) HPC supportive messages that include affiliative humor will be rated more supportive than HPC messages that do not contain affiliative humor, LPC supportive messages that contain affiliative humor, and LPC supportive messages that do not contain affiliative humor.*

*H3c) HPC supportive messages that include affiliative humor will be rated more sensitive than HPC messages that do not contain affiliative humor, LPC supportive messages that contain affiliative humor, and LPC supportive messages that do not contain affiliative humor.*

## CHAPTER 4

### METHOD

#### Participants

An a priori sample power analysis for a two-way ANCOVA F test using G\*Power noted that 277 participants were needed (the power analysis was based on the following assumptions (approximately equal sample sizes per group);  $\alpha = .05$ ; Power  $(1 - \beta) = .80$ ; and  $d = .50$ ). Before recruitment began, approval from the Institutional Review Board was secured to ensure the ethical treatment of all participants. Once approval was granted, participants were recruited from lower level communications courses and received a small (noncoersive) amount of extra credit for their participation.

Participants were 323 undergraduate students attending a mid-sized, southeastern, public university. The sample identified as 65.9% female ( $N = 213$ ), 32.5% male ( $N = 105$ ), and .6% as other ( $N = 2$ ). Three participants did not indicate their sex. Eighty-three percent of participants ( $N = 268$ ) reported their race as Caucasian, 9.3% Black/African American ( $N = 30$ ), 3.4% Asian/Pacific Islander ( $N = 11$ ), 2.8% Hispanic ( $N = 9$ ), 2.5% Native American ( $N = 8$ ), 3.4% other/multiracial ( $N = 11$ ), and 1.9% declined to respond ( $N = 6$ ). Approximately 92% reported their age as falling between 18-24 ( $N = 298$ ), 5% reported their age as falling between 25-34 ( $N = 16$ ), and 2.8% reported their age as falling between 35-54 ( $N = 9$ ).

#### Procedures

A 2(humor: no humor, with humor) x 2(person-centeredness: LPC, HPC) x 2(scenario: class, apartment) independent groups experiment was conducted via an online data collection mechanism. Participants were randomly assigned to read one of two scenarios in which a distressing event takes place and asked to imagine it was happening to them. Next they were

randomly assigned to read a supportive message that they might receive from a friend in response to the distressing scenario which either contained or did not contain affiliative humor, and was previously established to characterize high or low person-centeredness. These scenarios were composed and tested by Bodie et al., (2011a), and described situations which college students may commonly experience. These messages were adapted to include affiliative humor in the experimental condition while maintaining equal length (see appendix A). Humor was kept consistent between messages by applying three types of humor: sarcasm, exaggeration and surprise (Catanescu & Tom,2001). In response to the scenario and subsequent supportive message, participants completed a semantic differential scales designed to measure the perceived effectiveness of the message. Next participants completed manipulation checks to verify the person-centeredness and humor manipulations. Finally, participants were asked to provide demographic information disclosing age, race, and sex. The study took take participants approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete.

### **Instrumentation**

**Person-Centeredness.** The high and low person-centered messages adapted from Bodie et al. (2011a) were tested to verify the manipulation of the person-centeredness of the adapted messages were valid and consistent. The person-centeredness manipulation was tested using 4-items, from a 7-point semantic differential scale (Jones, 2004). Participants were asked whether they would describe the message from their friend as concerned or unconcerned, judgmental or nonjudgmental, self-centered or other centered, and validating or invalidating. The scale was reliable ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ,  $\alpha = .81$ ).

**Humor.** The humor manipulation was tested by adapting a scale used by Lee and Ferguson (2002) to measure participants' perceptions of their friends *attempt* to be humorous.

The 4-item measure included such items as, “my friend tried to make me laugh with their response” and “my friend tried to use humor in their response.” The scale was reliable ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ,  $\alpha = .85$ ).

**Perceived effectiveness.** Perceived effectiveness was measured using a 12- item semantic differential scale designed to measure perceptions of the three dimensions of supportive success identified by Goldsmith, McDermott and Alexander (2000): helpfulness, supportiveness, and sensitivity. Their investigation identified adjectives most commonly associated with these dimensions, and (paired with antonyms) make up the items on the semantic differential scale.

**Helpfulness.** The helpfulness dimension was measured with a 4 item, 7-point semantic differential scale using the word pairs: helpful —hurtful, useful—useless, knowledgeable—ignorant, and selfish—generous. The scale was reliable ( $M = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ ).

**Supportiveness.** Supportiveness was measured on a 4 item, 7-point semantic differential scale including the items: reassuring—upsetting, encouraging—discouraging, comforting—distressing, and supportive—unsupportive. The scale was reliable ( $M = 3.94$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ,  $\alpha = .92$ ).

**Sensitivity.** Sensitivity was operationalized with a 4 item, 7-point semantic differential scale using the word pairs: understanding —misunderstanding, considerate— inconsiderate, compassionate—heartless, sensitive—insensitive. The scale was reliable ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ ,  $\alpha = .92$ ).

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

#### Manipulation Checks

**Scenarios.** Participants' evaluations of academic and housing-related scenarios were initially analyzed to determine whether the nature of the scenario participants were asked to imagine themselves in influenced their perception of the supportive messages they received in response. No significant differences were found for perceptions of humorousness, supportiveness, or sensitivity between the different scenarios. There was a significant difference in perceptions of the helpfulness of the messages between the different scenarios. The messages responding to the academic scenario ( $M = 4.12$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ) were rated significantly more helpful than the messages responding to a housing issue ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ),  $t(313) = 2.769$ ,  $p < .05$ . Therefore, the results for helpfulness were reported for each scenario. For the other dependent variables the data were collapsed.

**Person-Centeredness.** The person-centeredness manipulation was successful as high person-centered messages were rated significantly higher in person-centeredness ( $M = 4.26$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) than low person-centered messages ( $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ),  $t(316) = -4.61$ ,  $p < .05$ .

**Humor.** The humor manipulation was successful as supportive messages containing affiliative humor ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ) were rated significantly higher on perceived humorousness than supportive messages which did not contain affiliative humor ( $M = 3.27$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ).  $t(317) = -8.37$ ,  $p < .05$ .

#### Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 predicted that supportive messages previously established to be high in person-centeredness would be rated higher in helpfulness, supportiveness, and sensitivity than

messages previously established to be low in person-centeredness. First, differences in perceived helpfulness of the high person-centered and low person-centered messages were examined via an independent samples t-test. For the academic scenario, HPC messages ( $M = 4.54$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ) were rated significantly more helpful than LPC messages ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ ),  $t(156) = -3.61$ ,  $p < .05$ . For the housing scenario, HPC messages ( $M = 3.97$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ) were rated significantly more helpful than LPC messages ( $M = 3.37$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ),  $t(157) = 2.83$ ,  $p < .05$ . Next, differences in perceived supportiveness were examined via an independent samples t-test. Results demonstrated that HPC messages ( $M = 4.40$ ,  $SD = 1.57$ ) were rated significantly more supportive than LPC messages ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ),  $t(319) = -5.32$ ,  $p < .05$ . Differences in perceived sensitivity were also examined via an independent samples t-test. Results demonstrated that HPC messages ( $M = 4.52$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ) were rated significantly more sensitive than LPC messages ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ),  $t(318) = -6.19$ ,  $p < .05$  (See table 1 for means and standard deviations).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that supportive messages utilizing affiliative humor would be rated higher in helpfulness, supportiveness, and sensitivity than non-humorous messages. First, differences in perceived helpfulness of humorous and non-humorous messages in both scenarios were examined separately via independent samples t-tests. For the academic scenario, humorous messages ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ) were rated significantly less helpful than non-humorous messages ( $M = 4.64$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ),  $t(156) = 4.62$ ,  $p < .05$ . For the housing scenario, humorous messages ( $M = 3.84$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ) were not significantly more helpful than non-humorous messages ( $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ),  $t(155) = -1.43$ ,  $p > .05$ . Next, differences in perceived supportiveness of humorous and non-humorous messages were examined via an independent samples t-test. Results demonstrated that humorous messages ( $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = 1.69$ ) were not more supportive than non-humorous messages ( $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ),  $t(319) = 1.69$ ,  $p > .05$ .

Finally, differences in perceived sensitivity of humorous and non-humorous messages were examined via an independent samples t-test. Results demonstrated that non-humorous messages ( $M = 4.17, SD = 1.65$ ) were perceived to be significantly more sensitive than humorous messages ( $M = 3.81, SD = 1.58$ ),  $t(318) = 2.00, p < .05$  (See table 2 for means and standard deviations).

Hypothesis 3 predicted an interaction between person-centeredness and affiliative humor such that supportive messages high in person-centeredness and affiliative humor would be considered the most effective supportive messages. First, the interaction between person-centeredness and humor on helpfulness was tested via a two-way ANOVA for each scenario. In the academic scenario, no significant interaction was found between person-centeredness and affiliative humor on ratings of helpfulness,  $F(1, 157) = .008, p > .05$ . In the housing scenario, no significant interaction was found between person-centeredness and humor on ratings of helpfulness,  $F(1, 156) = 1.69, p > .05$ . Next, the interaction between person-centeredness and humor on supportiveness was examined. Results of the two-way ANOVA demonstrated no significant interaction for person-centeredness and affiliative humor on ratings of supportiveness  $F(1, 320) = .388, p > .05$ . Finally, the interaction between person-centeredness and humor on sensitivity were tested via a two-way ANOVA. Results demonstrated there was no significant interaction for person-centeredness and affiliative humor on ratings of sensitivity  $F(1, 319) = .123, p > .05$  (See table 3 for means and standard deviations).

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION

Using the dual-process model of supportive communication as a conceptual framework, this investigation sought to explore humor as a means of enhancing the effectiveness of supportive message content. Previous supportive communication research has identified person-centeredness as a valuable construct when considering supportive message content. High person-centered messages are consistently shown to improve affect in distressed individuals receiving support. High person-centered messages explicitly recognize and legitimize the other's feelings, elaborate reasons why those feelings are present, and explore how those emotions fit within a broader context. Research on humor (particularly affiliative humor) identify specific characteristics which theoretically may enhance a messages ability to: enhance affiliation between the sender and the receiver, encourage the expression of emotions and broaden perspective. Creating affiliation may enhance a messages ability to recognize and legitimize the other's feelings by helping them articulate those feelings, because individuals are generally more comfortable talking about their feelings with a person they feel close to (Meeks, Hendrick & Hendrick, 1998). Expressing feelings may help in elaborating on the reasons for those feelings because it is often necessary to access and express emotion before one is able to rationally analyze the origin of and influences on what is felt (Wood, 2013). Affiliative humor can encourage catharsis (Oring, 1992; Weisfeld, 1993). Gaining perspective may help another explore their emotions in context, because to gain perspective is to better recognize the broader variables and circumstances which influence a given situation. It was therefore hypothesized that HPC messages may be enhanced through the use of affiliative humor. To measure the effectiveness of the messages, this thesis proposed that incorporating affiliative humor into

supportive messages would enhance perceptions of the helpfulness, supportiveness, and sensitivity of those messages. Given that humor research from the fields of communication, psychology, persuasion, and advertising indicate that the incorporation of humor increases attention to the message, liking of the source and perceived trustworthiness of the source, humor appeared theoretically suited to enhance the utility of supportive message content.

Hypothesis one proposed that messages previously determined to exemplify high person-centeredness would be rated significantly higher in helpfulness, supportiveness, and sensitivity than messages established as low in person-centeredness. Results showed that HPC messages were rated significantly higher in helpfulness in both scenarios, as well as in supportiveness and sensitivity, than LPC messages. These findings suggest that the dimensions of helpfulness, supportiveness, and sensitivity can be used to effectively operationalize person-centeredness. This result is valuable to supportive communication research as it synthesizes different theoretical perspectives in supportive communication and demonstrates consistency between them.

Hypothesis two proposed that supportive messages incorporating affiliative humor would be rated higher in helpfulness, supportiveness, and sensitivity than non-humorous messages. Results showed that affiliative humor did not significantly enhance perceptions of helpfulness for either scenario; however, in the housing scenario, humorous messages were rated significantly less helpful than messages using humor. For both scenarios, affiliative humor did not significantly increase perceptions of supportiveness of the messages, and non-humorous messages were rated significantly more sensitive than humorous messages. In this investigation, humor did not enhance the supportive message's effectiveness. This outcome may reflect that the humor manipulation may not have exemplified affiliative humor. Whereas participants did

recognize the attempts of their imagined comforter to include humor, this recognition did not increase their perceptions of the helpfulness, supportiveness, or sensitivity of the messages. To the contrary, the fact that humor lessened the helpfulness of the message for the housing scenario as well as the overall sensitivity of the messages indicates that participants may have felt that the humor was belittling their distress or making fun of their misfortune.

Hypothesis three predicted an interaction between person-centeredness and affiliative humor, such that HPC messages incorporating affiliative humor would be rated significantly higher in helpfulness, supportiveness and sensitivity. Data analysis showed no significant interaction between person-centeredness and affiliative humor. Given that the results of hypothesis two showed that humor did not enhance the helpfulness, supportiveness, or sensitivity of the messages, it is reasonable to find that the addition of affiliative humor did not interact with the person-centeredness of a message. The perception that the humor was making light of their distress is the best explanation for this finding.

Overall, this investigation showed that humor did not increase the effectiveness of supportive messages, and in some respects, humor decreased effectiveness. This finding may reflect limitations in the study design, or could potentially indicate that this type humor is not well-suited for use in supportive messages within the selected contexts. When one is distressed, one may be particularly vulnerable to perceived criticism and especially defensive should he or she feel ridiculed. In these circumstances, it must be abundantly clear that the humor is not intended to be critical, rather that it represents the closeness between the giver and receiver of the supportive message and the relationship they share. Whereas it is not clear that all humor is inappropriate in supportive communication, the present investigation suggests that it should certainly be used with caution. Humor has the potential to undermine the supportive goals of

comforting messages (particularly the aim to be helpful and sensitive) and may not be appropriate in many supportive interactions.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations constrain the utility of the present research. The most significant limitation of this investigation is the absence of a pilot study to test the success of the message manipulations. Using three types of humor ensured consistency between the messages; however the humorous statements included did not successfully exemplify affiliative humor. A pilot study utilizing humor that more clearly indicates affiliation between the sender and receiver, encourages emotional expression, and broadens perspective would have functioned to ensure that added humor was perceived to be humorous and that the jokes did not appear to undermine or discount the distress of the receiver. A pilot study may have also indicated the differing perceptions of the scenarios and allowed for adjustment to increase consistency between scenarios. Although it is valuable to test perceptions of supportive messages responding to a broad variety of situations (as all manner of distressing situations may call for the support and comfort of another) the results of this investigation would have been more meaningful if the evaluations of messages indicated that the scenarios were perceived to represent the same level of disaster and distress, and the messages in response perceived to have the same degree of utility. This inconsistency diluted the findings in this investigation.

It was hoped that data could be collapsed and analyzed across scenarios in this investigation. For the majority of the variables (supportiveness, sensitivity, person-centeredness, humor), the scenario made no difference on perceptions of the messages; however, perceptions of helpfulness were affected. Analysis showed that participants considered the supportive messages responding to a scenario in which they were asked to imagine that their roommate had

moved out of their shared apartment leaving them with the bills to be less helpful than supportive messages responding to a scenario in which they imagined they had received a failing grade in a class necessary for their major. The fact that the scenarios were rated differently only in helpfulness reflects the differences in the nature of the distressing circumstances and the practical role that support could or could not play in each. The academic scenario is more easily addressed by practical advice, as the student may retake the class in the near-future and (to some degree) fix the problem at hand. Other than reminding the distressed person of this possible course of redress, a supportive message may also offer instrumental advice on the study habits of the failing student. In the housing scenario, however, there is no practical solution for the comforter to suggest without offering to lend their friend the money they need. No practical, instrumental advice would change the fact that the distressed individual is expected to pay bills that he or she does not have the resources to pay. Because the scenarios were collapsible for all other dependent variables reinforces the proposition that the fundamental difference between the scenarios is in their potential for immediate (or short-term) practical redress.

Next, any investigation asking participants to imagine themselves in a situation inhibits the external validity of the findings. Given that participants were asked to imagine a friend responding to their imagined distress, the nature of participant's imaginations could easily influence results. For example, if a participant chose a specific friend to keep in mind while reading the supportive messages, it is possible that the message did not resonate as something that friend would say causing the participant to question the sincerity or utility of the message.

Any study examining humor may also be limited by its nebulous nature. Whereas the humor manipulation was successful in the present investigation, it sought to test only whether participants were aware that the messages made an effort to be funny. Making the effort to be

funny does show a certain level of commitment on the part of the sender of the supportive message indicating the intimacy of the relationship between sender and receiver. The relational message sent by humor may indicate a stronger relationship between the sender and receiver of supportive communication and thus lend strength to the supportive appeal; however, the spontaneous and personal nature of humor contributes largely to its communicative and relational value. The standardized humor that is necessary for internal validity in a lab or survey setting does not accurately represent the nature or use of organic humor. Although humor was successfully implemented in the messages in this investigation, humor that is uniquely affiliative was not. External validity is a necessary sacrifice in order to advance humor research and generate generalizable data.

### **Future Research**

Future research can overcome these limitations in a variety of ways. First, in any investigation exploring the creation of messages it is necessary to run pilot studies to test the manipulation of variables within the message. Enabling researchers to adapt and improve the messages based on findings from the pilot increases the validity and consistency of the manipulations used in the full study. Future research on the specific role of humor in supportive communication should attempt to show that their message manipulation employed solely affiliative humor. In this way, perceptions that the humor in the message is insensitive or discredits the experiences of the recipient may be minimized.

Future research should explore the utility of humor over a wider variety of circumstances and over varying levels of distress. It may be shown that mild distress is addressed and diffused effectively by humor, but the distress caused by more serious circumstances is only heightened by attempts at humor. Although the findings of the present investigations suggest that humor is

not useful (and may be harmful) to supportive messages, it is possible that the scenarios used represented scenarios too serious and distressing for the individuals suffering to be effectively comforted by humor.

Future researchers may also develop methods for measuring the relative effectiveness of supportive messages without asking participants to imagine themselves in a hypothetical situation. Burlison and MacGeorge (2002) state, “there is obviously a difference between actually experiencing a message when upset and making judgments about messages directed at hypothetical others” (p. 391). This sentiment can be expanded to refer to messages directed at ones hypothetical self, as judgments of what one thinks they might feel may be quite different from reflections on what one actually felt in response to a distressful situation or a subsequent supportive message.

Future research investigating the utility of humor in supportive communication would benefit from exploring the natural, spontaneous humor that occurs in close relationships. Interview, content analysis, or an ethnographic approach may provide insight on the value of “real” humor and may even find more consistent patterns of the use of humor in different distressing situations. The difficulty in this investigation was in manipulating previously established messages to include statements that would be humorous without being aggressive or patronizing. Further qualitative research may identify patterns in the way affiliative humor is used successfully in everyday life, which could then be implemented and tested by quantitative researchers.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the present investigation sought to determine whether the use of humor is valuable in supportive communication. Findings of this study indicated that it is not helpful and

may in fact be harmful to the utility of supportive messages. Humor is a powerful force in communication shown to have significant influence on how individuals evaluate messages. A valuable goal of supportive communication theorists may be to discover what components of humor (relational enhancement, gaining perspective, expressing emotions, increasing attention, liking or trust of the source of the message) can best be implemented in supportive messages and how best this implementation can be accomplished. Given previous findings regarding the cathartic, healing, and relational properties of humor, it is still quite possible that there may be comfort in a joke.

Table 1

*Mean Ratings of LPC and HPC Supportive Messages as a Function of Evaluations of Helpfulness, Supportiveness and Sensitivity (with Standard Deviations in Parentheses)*

Person-Centeredness	Evaluations of Supportive Messages		
	Helpful	Supportive	Sensitive
LPC	3.69 (1.63)* 3.37 (1.33)**	3.47 (1.58)	3.45 (1.51)
HPC	4.54 (1.33)* 3.97 (1.45)**	4.40 (1.57)	4.52 (1.56)

\* = Academic Scenario

\*\*= Housing Scenario

Table 2

*Mean Ratings of Humorous and Non-humorous Supportive Messages as a Function of Evaluations of Helpfulness, Supportiveness and Sensitivity (with Standard Deviations in Parentheses)*

Humor Manipulation	Evaluations of Supportive Messages		
	Helpful	Supportive	Sensitive
No Humor	4.64 (1.34)*		
	3.52 (1.44)**	4.09 (1.59)	4.17 (1.65)
Humor	3.57 (1.56)*	3.78 (1.69)	3.81 (1.58)
	3.84 (1.39)**		

\* = Academic Scenario

\*\*= Housing Scenario

Table 3

*Average Evaluations of Supportive Messages as a Function of Humor and Person-Centeredness  
(with Standard Deviations in Parentheses)*

Person-Centeredness	Dimensions of Supportive Success		
	Helpful	Supportive	Sensitive
	Humor		
LPC	3.13 (1.58)* 3.39 (1.37)**	3.25 (1.69)	3.31 (1.56)
HPC	4.01 (1.44)* 4.29 (1.29)**	4.30 (1.53)	4.31 (1.45)
	No Humor		
LPC	4.22 (1.52)* 3.35 (1.30)**	3.66 (1.45)	3.59 (1.46)
HPC	5.05 (.99)* 3.67 (1.55)**	4.49 (1.61)	4.71 (1.65)

\* = Academic Scenario

\*\*= Housing Scenario

## Appendix A



**Office of Research Integrity**  
 Institutional Review Board  
 401 11th St., Suite 1300  
 Huntington, WV 25701

FWA 00002704

IRB1 #00002205

IRB2 #00003206

April 2, 2013

Cynthia Torppa, PhD  
 Communication Studies

RE: IRBNet ID# 437633-1

At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Torppa:

**Protocol Title:** [437633-1] An investigation of the role of humor in social support

**Expiration Date:** April 2, 2014

**Site Location:** MU

**Submission Type:** New Project APPROVED

**Review Type:** Exempt Review

In accordance with 45CFR46.101(b)(2), the above study and informed consent were granted Exempted approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Designee for the period of 12 months. The approval will expire April 2, 2014. A continuing review request for this study must be submitted no later than 30 days prior to the expiration date.

This study is for student Miranda Morgan.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Coordinator Michelle Woomer, B.A., M.S at (304) 696-4308 or woomer3@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

## Appendix B

Scenario one: Imagine that it is the end of finals week. You have just completed the semester. You were enrolled in a particularly tough class that requires a B to officially enter your major. Since the professor indicated grades would be posted by the end of the week, you log onto Blackboard to check your grades. As you look at your grade you are shocked. The grade on the screen is lower than what you needed to enter your major. In fact, it's a D. You feel awful – you are very disappointed about your grade in the class and quite upset about not qualifying to enter your desired major. You feel even worse when you realize that you may have to re-take this class over the summer rather than participate in a summer internship you received. Later that day, you run into your friend. After exchanging greetings, this person senses that you are upset and inquires, "What is the matter?" You begin to explain the situation. Your friend replies:

LPC Message (no humor): Well, maybe you just didn't try hard enough. Maybe that's why you got a D. You're probably just gonna have to study harder from now on, and maybe you shouldn't go out to the bars so much. You know, you shouldn't be so upset about the class if you didn't work as hard as you could have—you can't blame the class or the final when you screw up. Besides, there are more important things in the world than getting into a certain major, and it's not like you are being kicked out of the university. Anyway, it's a pretty dumb class; it's really not worth worrying about. I know you're disappointed about losing the internship, but internships aren't exactly the most fun way to spend your summer. So, just try to forget about it. Think about something else.

LPC Message (with humor): Well, maybe you just didn't try hard enough. Maybe that's why you got a D. You're probably just gonna have to study harder from now on, and party less- or at least invite your professor to the parties! You know, you shouldn't be so upset about the class if you didn't work as hard as you could have. After all, I know all you really wanted in life was to be a cast member on "Buckwild." Anyway, it's a pretty dumb class; it's really not worth worrying about. There are more important things in the world than getting into a certain major-I know you're disappointed about losing the internship, but at least you won't spend the summer as the office eye candy for some old uggos...although you might like that kind of thing. So, just try to forget about it. Think about something else.

HPC Message (no humor): Well, it makes sense that you feel bummed out about the grade. Next time I guess you'll have to study a bit more and party a bit less. I mean, I know how frustrating it is to work really hard in a class and still not do well. That can drive you crazy – it can sort of blow your self-confidence. But look...well, I know it's probably hard to look at it this way, but maybe you've learned something from this that will help you do better in the class if you retake it, and next semester you'll have the opportunity to make it right. I know you're disappointed about losing the internship and it's hard not to worry about it—and you've got every right to feel that way—but internships aren't exactly the most fun way to spend your summer. I'm sure that you can figure something out; you're one of the brightest people I know. That's why this must be getting to you right now. I know you're not very happy right now, but it will be ok.

HPC Message (with humor): Well, it makes sense that you feel bummed out about the grade. You're probably just gonna have to study harder from now on, and party less- or at least invite your professor to the parties! I mean, I know how frustrating it is to work really hard in a class and still not do well. That can drive you crazy – it can sort of blow your self-confidence. I know it's probably hard to look at it this way, but maybe you've learned something from this that will help you do better in the class if you retake it. I know it's hard not to worry about it—after all, all you really wanted in life was to be a cast member on “Buckwild,” right? I know you’re disappointed about losing the internship, but at least you won’t spend the summer as the office eye candy for some old uggos...although you might like that kind of thing. I'm sure that you can figure something out; you're one of the brightest people I know. That's why this must be getting to you right now.

Scenario two: Imagine you are sharing an apartment off-campus with a roommate. You come back to school from a weekend trip. When you walk in the door you look around and realize that something is different – everything that belongs to your roommate is gone. There's a note taped to your bedroom door that reads, "Sorry I had to do this. I can't live here anymore; I just can't afford the rent and other expenses. I moved back home." All the bills are in your name and they'll be due in less than a week – and you don't have any money to cover extra expenses. You feel quite angry at your former roommate for abandoning you and are really anxious about how you will pay for things. You feel even worse when you realize that you have several months left on your lease. Later that day, you run into your friend. After exchanging greetings, this person senses that you are upset and inquires, "What is the matter?" You begin to explain the situation. Your friend replies:

LPC Message (no humor): Wow, that note doesn't really clear things up at all. Well, just try to forget about it. You know, there are more important things in the world than losing a roommate. And maybe you shouldn't be so surprised. I mean, you picked to live there! It looks like you're going to just have to deal with this, you'll have to prioritize and maybe you can find creative ways to cut down on your bills. Anyway, it sounds like he/she sucked anyway, to just leave all of a sudden like that and to take all of their stuff. So, just let it go. Think about something else.

LPC Message (with humor): That note might as well have said, “I’m an irresponsible loser. Love, your shitty roommate.” Still, you should just try to forget about it. You know, there are more important things in the world than losing a roommate. And maybe you shouldn't be so surprised. I mean, you picked to live there! It looks like you're going to just have to deal with this. You'll just have to prioritize now; I mean why pay Comcast when there's Starbucks down the street? Anyway, it sounds like he/she sucked anyway- at least he/she didn't take all your stuff too! So, just let it go. Think about something else.

HPC Message (no humor): Wow, that note doesn't really clear things up at all, but sure. I understand. I mean, it's awful to go out of town and come home to find your place nearly empty with all of their stuff gone. Then you find out that you're stuck with the bills! I know that would make me extremely angry. I guess you'll have to prioritize now and maybe find creative ways to cut down on your bills. It's understandable that you'd be stressed out. I wish there were something I could say or do to make you feel better.

HPC Message (with humor): Sure, I understand. That note might as well have said, "I'm an irresponsible loser. Love, your shitty roommate." I mean, it's awful to go out of town and come home to find your place nearly empty. I'm surprised they didn't take all of your stuff too! Then you find out that you're stuck with the bills! I know that would make me extremely angry. You'll just have to prioritize now; I mean why pay Comcast when there's Starbucks down the street? But it's understandable that you'd be stressed out- I wish there were something I could say or do to make you feel better.

## Appendix C

### Helpfulness Measure

Goldsmith McDermott and Alexander (2000)

7-point semantic differential

Helpful—hurtful

Useless—useful

Ignorant—knowledgeable

Selfish—generous

### Supportiveness Measure

Goldsmith McDermott and Alexander (2000)

7-point semantic differential

Supportive—unsupportive

Upsetting—reassuring

Comforting—distressing

Encouraging—discouraging

### Sensitivity Measure

Goldsmith McDermott and Alexander (2000)

7-point semantic differential

Sensitive—insensitive

Heartless—compassionate

Considerate—inconsiderate

Misunderstanding—understanding

### Affect Change Measure

Adapted from Clark, Pierce, Finn, Hsu, Toosley, & Williams, (1998).

7-point Likert (Strongly agree—Strongly disagree)

Think about the message from your friend in response to the stressful situation

I would feel better after talking with my friend.

The message from my friend would make me feel better about myself.

I would feel more optimistic after talking with my friend.

The message from my friend would help me understand the situation better

### Humor Manipulation Check

Adapted from Lee and Ferguson, (2002)

7-point Likert (Strongly agree—Strongly disagree)

\*Reverse scored

Please indicate how humorous you found your friend's response to your stressful situation

My friend tried to be funny in their response

My friend tried to use humor in their response

My friend did not try to amuse me with their response\*

My friend tried to make me laugh with their response

Person-centeredness Manipulation Check

Adapted from Jones, 2004

7-point semantic differential

I would describe the message from my friend as:

Concerned—unconcerned

Self-centered—other-centered

Judgmental—empathetic

Validating—invalidating

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## **RESUME**

### Miranda R. Morgan

#### **Education:**

Master of Arts in Communication Studies at Marshall University	May 2013
Graduated from Bradley University in Peoria, IL	May 2010
- Bachelors of Science in Psychology	
- Minor in Sociology	
- Minor in Women's Studies	
Graduated From James Madison Memorial High School	June 2006

#### **Awards:**

Illinois State Champion Program Oral Interpretation- 2010  
 Quarterfinalist in Program Oral Interpretation- 2009 American Forensics Association (AFA)  
 Quarterfinalist in After Dinner Speaking- 2009 National Forensics Association (NFA)  
 Semifinalist in Dramatic Interpretation- 2009 NFA  
 6<sup>th</sup> place in Prose Interpretation- 2010 AFA  
 4<sup>th</sup> place in Dramatic Interpretation- 2010 AFA  
 Quarterfinalist in Duo Interpretation- 2010 NFA  
 Semifinalist in After Dinner Speaking- 2010 NFA  
 2<sup>nd</sup> place in Dramatic Interpretation- 2010 NFA  
 13<sup>th</sup> place in overall individual sweepstakes- 2010 NFA

#### **Employment History:**

**Graduate Teaching Assistant at Marshall University** January 2012- Present  
Job Duties: Teaching multiple sections of CMM 103- Marshall's introductory public speaking course.

**Captioning Assistant at Captel, Inc.** August 2010- July 2011  
Job Duties: Providing real time captions of telephone conversations for customers with hearing loss using speech recognition software.

**Forensics Coach James Madison Memorial HS** November 2006 – March 2011  
Job Duties: Coaching students in competitive speaking and acting as well as judging students at competitions.

**Forensics Coach at Bradley University** Summer 2009  
Job Duties: Teaching writing and speaking skills to high school students and helping them to improve their performance skills.

**Photographer at Sears Portrait Studio** June 2008- August 2009  
Job Duties: Photography, Cleaning/straightening studio, customer service, sales.

**Sales Associate at Claire's Boutique** June – August 2007  
Job Duties: Cleaning/straightening sales floor, sales, ear piercing certified, cash register

**Caller for Bradley Fund** August – December 2006  
Job Duties: Calling alumni to update them on campus events and collect donations to Bradley University.

**Sales Associate/Cashier - TJ Maxx** May 2004 – August 2006  
Job Duties: Cleaning/straightening sales floor, fitting room attendant, customer service, cashier, jewelry counter attendant/sales

**Camp counselor - Camp Invention UW-Platteville** Summer 2004  
Job Duties: Supervision of ten 8-10 year olds, Planning/ overseeing various educational enrichment activities aimed at science and creativity.

**\*\*References available upon request\*\***