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THE FUNCTIONS OF HUMOR IN GENDER CONFLICT

By

Renee Beth Stahle

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ABSTRACT  
THE FUNCTIONS OF HUMOR IN GENDER CONFLICT

By  
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The supposition that if men and women are in a majority-minority relationship then their use of humor should be similar to that of other groups in the same relationship was studied by comparing the content of cartoons to the divorce rate as indicators of cultural patterns. A content analysis was performed on cartoons that were randomly selected from three categories of magazines for the years 1950 to 1975 by five year intervals.

Three categories of humor were formulated; conflict, social control and social disregard. The percent of humor in the conflict and social control categories was found to be negatively correlated with the divorce rate. The percent of humor in the social disregard category, however, was found to be positively correlated with the divorce rate. These results suggest that the main response in humor to the rising conflict between men and women has been a corresponding redefinition and disregard of the conflictual relationship.

When separated by type of magazine: men's magazines were found to contain the highest percent of social control humor; women's magazines, the highest percent of conflict humor; and general magazines, the highest percent of social disregard humor. These results suggest

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that a higher percentage of the humor which reflects each group's perspective of the conflict between the sexes will appear in magazines that are oriented toward each of the different groups.

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## INTRODUCTION

Humor has played an important role throughout the history of majority-minority group relations in this country. The majority group (e.g., Whites) evaluates the characteristics of their own group positively and those of the minority group (e.g., Blacks) negatively. The majority group claims that the minority group is inferior and uses this claim to deny them access to the privileges and advantages available in society. When an awareness occurs among members of the minority group that their low status is unjust, they have often attempted to change the relationship of inequality. These attempts have been met with strong resistance from the majority group which attempts to maintain its positive distinctiveness from the minority group and to preserve or restore its superiority. One social control strategy adopted by the majority group has been the use of humor to stress adherence to traditional cultural definitions of the minority group and to ridicule deviations from these definitions. If we conceive of the society as a selective system, then another social control strategy used by the majority group is redefinition of the conflict between the majority and the minority groups in society in such a way as to decrease its social significance. The minority group, however, uses humor to gain ascendancy or temporary advantage over the majority group. Figure 1 summarizes this conceptualization of the use of humor in majority-minority relationships. Since the use of humor by the majority group (ridiculer)

	RIDICULER	TARGET OF RIDICULE
CONFLICT	Minority group, member or others who represent the views of the minority group	Majority group, member or others who represent the views to the majority group
SOCIAL CONTROL SOCIAL REDEFINITION AND DISREGARD	Majority group, member or others who represent the views of the majority group	Minority group, member or others who represent the views of the minority group

Figure 1. How humor functions as conflict, social control and social disregard in majority-minority relations.

which makes the minority group the target of ridicule is intended to control the minority group it is labeled social control. The use of humor by the majority group (ridiculer) which redefines the majority-minority conflict as insignificant and makes the target of the ridicule the minority group's contention that there is something wrong with the traditional majority-minority relationship is labeled social disregard. The use of humor by the minority group (ridiculer) which attempts to change the traditional majority-minority relationship by making the majority group the target of ridicule is labeled conflict.

The differential use of humor has been shown to have characterized the relationship between majority and minority groups (ethnic immigrants and various racial minorities) throughout the history of the United States. More recently, many people have drawn an analogy between the inferior position of women and that of minority groups. Analysis of the relationship between the sexes as one of majority and

minority has been hampered, however, by the lack of a fully applicable theoretical framework on the intergroup level. There has also been little work done on the use of humor between men and women. This study, then, is an attempt to study the supposition that if men and women are in a majority-minority relationship then their use of humor should be similar to that of other groups in the same relationship.

## SOCIOLOGY OF HUMOR

Sociological analysis of humor<sup>1</sup> has focused on the social functions of humor in intergroup relations.<sup>2</sup> Although most researchers in this field agree that humor functions socially as a means of expressing conflict and exercising social control, few would agree on how humor accomplishes these functions. There are two theoretical orientations that attempt to explain the function of humor in expressing conflict in majority-minority relations. One orientation follows Freud's (1936) assumption that exposure to tendentious humor reduces aggressive tendencies. The function of humor, then, is to provide a safe way for group members to express aggressive feelings. The other orientation follows the superiority theories of humor (Berlyne, 1968) which hold that laughter is directed at those who are considered inferior and is, in itself,

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<sup>1</sup>In the sociology of humor literature, humor is used like Freud's (1938) conception of wit. Wit is here defined as some form of cleverness which has the potential for amusing but also is intended to achieve one or more other purposes.

<sup>2</sup>Group can refer to a particular gender, region, ethnicity, occupation, age, subculture or language. In the sociology of humor literature intergroup has traditionally been used to refer to the relationship between Whites and ethnic or racial minorities. According to Gittler, as presented in Simpson and Yinger (1972), minority groups are those whose members experience a wide range of discriminatory treatment and frequently are relegated to positions relatively low in the status structure of a society. According to Wirth, as presented in Simpson and Yinger (1972), the existence of a minority in a society implies the existence of a corresponding dominant group with higher social status and greater privileges.



a form of triumph and superiority. This theory sees the deflation of the target and the enhancement of morale of those who tell the joke as the function of the humor. [There are also two competing approaches that attempt to explain the function of humor in exercising social control in majority-minority relationships.] One approach stresses the use of stereotypic portrayals in humor of the minority group and the ridicule of minority group deviations from these stereotypes. The other approach stresses the redefinition in humor of majority-minority conflict as insignificant so that it is not mentioned or it is presented as a minor issue. The function of the humor in both approaches is the maintenance of the traditional majority-minority relationship. [The conflict function of humor more often serves the purposes of the minority group while the majority group uses humor for social control.]

An important variable in the majority-minority relationship is the differential power of the majority group relative to the minority group. The superior power of the majority group makes open resistance on the part of the minority group seem useless or impossible. Consequently, the minority uses more covert forms of protest such as sabotage and humor. Humor has been a particularly important form of protest because following a Freudian interpretation, it is an institutionalized provision for the release of hostilities which allows minority group members to gain temporary advantage over the majority group without serious societal consequences. [According to Simmons (1963), minority humor utilizes the following forms: (1) trickster motifs, where a member of the minority group successfully counters an insult offered by a majority group members, (2) parody of an alleged somatic or cultural stereotype of the minority group, (3) a rigorous following of majority group logic

to an unexpected conclusion and (4) denigrating the majority group.]  
 Cartoon examples of these forms of humor<sup>3</sup> are presented in Figures A4  
 through A6.<sup>4</sup>

Humor functions as social control through (1) attempts by the majority group to preserve the traditional majority-minority relationship, (2) minority group sanctions against other minority group members who do not conform to the minority culture and (3) societal disregard of conflict between majority and minority groups. [The social control humor used by the majority group to preserve the traditional majority-minority relationship contains two different contents. The first exemplifies the stereotyped peculiarities of the minority group. In the second majority group members ridicule deviations from these stereotypes to show that members of the minority group cannot be taken seriously;] for example, asserting that they are too stupid or dumb or ugly or childlike or smelly or mean to count as human (Weisstein, 1973). This humor functions as social control by creating the impression among members of the majority group that they can stave off, postpone or otherwise control social change with respect to an inferior minority group. Winick (1976) also suggests that at some stage in the majority-minority relationship the majority group begins to use humor as a means of learning to accept the new role of the minority group. Thus, majority group

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<sup>3</sup>The following terms are used in this study to identify different kinds of humor. Types of humor are those which can be distinguished as identifiable classes; cartoons, written or verbal jokes and comedy routines. Within the types of humor different forms or structured patterns can be identified. The content of humor is the specified material or topics contained within a type or form of humor.

<sup>4</sup>Figures with capital letters before their numbers can be found in the appropriate Appendices.

members can express ambivalence toward a group while blunting its impact and avoiding reprisal by sharing their humor with others who share their feelings toward the minority group.

Minority groups may use humor to sanction their own members who do not conform to the minority culture. Hence they, too, may draw on humor for social control. Most of the research in this area is concerned with ethnic (e.g., immigrant) groups. The primary cultural affiliation for first generation immigrants is usually the ethnic culture. Second generation immigrants, however, can get trapped between the ethnic culture of home and the majority culture of school and work. One resolution of this dilemma is an attempt by some second generation immigrants to assimilate or become part of the majority group. Some of the tensions between first and second generation immigrants get expressed in humor with each generation's cultural affiliations being used as a target by the other generation.

The content of some humor that functions as social control within ethnic groups is approval or disapproval of minority group members' responses to the majority-minority relationship. With respect to the ethnic culture, Simmons (1969) points out that the content of the most prevalent ethnic humor implies that personal salvation is only to be found within the ethnic group (Figure A3). With the assimilation attempts on the part of some immigrants, however, the jokes they tell each other become more concerned with the conflict between assimilation and traditional loyalties than are jokes which others tell about them (Winick, 1976). The presence among ethnic groups of humor that derogates the ethnic group also results from the assimilation attempts by some ethnic group members. According to La Fave and Mannell (1976),

immigrants who attempt to assimilate the majority group's culture experience so many frustrations with respect to their ethnic group that they develop a more negative attitude towards it than members of the majority group. The same effect was found for humor appreciation by Middleton and Moland (1959). Middle-class Blacks were found to enjoy jokes about Blacks as much as did whites; the same was not true of lower-class Blacks. The position of minority group members in the assimilation process may also explain the differential use of stereotypes among minority groups.

Minority group humor also perpetuates and develops stereotypes. Winick (1976) provides examples of self-deprecating humor used by the minority group involving the same kinds of stereotypes of the minority group held by the rest of society. This humor is an attempt by immigrants to cope with their oppressive situation by naming it and laughing at it.<sup>5</sup> The use of stereotypes in minority humor may also reflect "attitude switching" among some immigrants. For example, a present-day immigrant may relate an amusing story about an event that happened to him when he first arrived in this country (Winick, 1976). Humor also exists among minority group members which reflects stereotypes that are based on intimate, in-group relations. Schechler (1970, p. 154) presents this example of ridicule of "Uncle Toms" by a Black cartoonist who captioned these instructions of an elderly Negro head waiter to his younger charges, "Patrons is all complainin', because you cats ain't showin your gums and actin' like happy children of nature . . . so

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<sup>5</sup>As suggested by Myrdal (1944) this humor also has the unintended consequence of providing collective surreptitious approbation for the relationship. An example of this humorous approbation by minority group members is presented in Figure A10.

everyone stays after work tonight and we're gonna rehearse." Apparently differences do exist between first and second generation immigrants in their use of humor but the studies do not make clear whether these differences are based on the content and/or the forms of humor used. It is likely that first generation immigrants use both the same forms and contents of humor against second generation immigrants that they use against the majority group. Second generation immigrants may adopt the humorous attacks on immigrants that are typical of the majority group to which they aspire. The humor used by members of each generation may also have unique contents and forms that reflect their intragroup relationship. In addition, Weisstein (1973) states that the ethnic humor with which she was personally familiar (Eastern European Jewish) did not contain Jewish stereotypes. It is possible given these unclear and conflicting results that certain contents and forms of humor are used only at certain stages in the assimilation process. Additional work needs to be done on the sequencing of different contents and forms of humor in the assimilation process.

Although the majority group sets the cultural pattern in society, it must be kept in mind that there are also cultural values which promote social cooperation among all the subgroups in a society. The studies done by Kolaja (1950) and Stephenson (1951) show adherence to the ideal of social cooperation in mass media humor. Kolaja (1950) found that popular American magazine cartoons avoid controversial social issues and social pathological phenomena such as corruption, strikes and prostitution. Rather, the cartoons concentrate on small group issues and their simple human aspects which Kolaja interprets as stimulating a sympathetic attitude for universal human failings.

Stephenson (1951) concluded in his study of stratification humor that the kind of joke found in anthologies of humor reveals an adherence to a set of values regarded as the traditional American Creed (e.g., harmony, equality) rather than any conception of an inherent conflict within the culture itself. A final way that humor may function as social control, then, is by reflecting the social redefinition of conflict in society as a minor issue which need not be mentioned or which can be presented as amusing human failing.

Two general conclusions can be drawn from this review of the humor literature. First, humor reflects the differing perceptions of groups with different stakes in the majority-minority relationship. Secondly, the contents and forms of humor change, in as yet unspecified ways, as the majority-minority relationship changes. Unfortunately, the studies that were previously presented mainly describe the use of humor by ethnic groups during the process of assimilation. By focusing on ethnic groups this previous work ignores more physically distinct minority groups (racial groups and women) who may find it difficult to assimilate into the majority culture and hence must adopt other strategies to gain equality.

Arnez and Anthony (1969) contend that there is a relationship between Blacks' social and economic position and the humor they create. Therefore their first stage of humor concerns the reactions of Blacks to their treatment by Whites during the slavery period. In this stage humor is used by Blacks to gain psychological leverage and as a weapon of survival against Whites. The use of humor amongst Blacks during the slavery period is an oral tradition in which the group pokes fun at its own customs. It is based on many intimate associations and allusions

that are a part of Blacks' social experience and so helps to provide a social cohesiveness. By necessity, it is also a covert type of humor. Burma (1946, p. 712) provides this example of two Black maids who were comparing notes:

"At my place I have a terrible time; all day it's 'Yes Ma'am,' 'Yes Ma'am,'"

"Me, too," says the other, "but with me it's 'No, Sir,' 'No, Sir,' 'No, Sir.'"

This is a joke rich in implications concerning the history of Black-White, employer-employee and sex relations. Blacks during the slavery period could hardly accept the unjustness of their situation in any other way and retain their psychic equilibrium.

In their relationship with Whites, humor (smiling and laughing) became a means of accommodation. Blacks during the slavery period laughed, though unamused, to attempt to appear as a "good sport" and so avoid punishment. Blacks who smiled charmed the Whites so that they did not have to work so hard. Finally, by grinning and laughing, they fooled Whites into believing they were happy, contented and in their place.

Arnez and Anthony conceptualize the second stage of Black humor as a public humor perpetuated by Whites that depicts the Black stereotypically post-slavery and pre-civil rights (the Jim Crow period). Al Jolson's routine is good example of this form of humor; his portrayal of Blacks again reassured Whites that Blacks were safely "in their place." Blacks even helped to foster this image through their own use of public humor. According to Winick (1976) Bert Williams, a great Black comedian, used to tell completely different jokes to Black and

White audiences although both sets of stories were concerned with Black life. The humor that was told to Black audiences perpetuated and enriched the private in-group humor of the Blacks while White audiences found comfort in his representation of happy and hopeful Blacks.

Arnez and Anthony suggest that the third stage of Black humor paralleled the trends toward "Black consciousness" and militancy. In a study of humor amongst Blacks by Singer, reported by Berlyne (1968), it was found that Black college students told an increasing number of hostile anti-White jokes as White-Black tension increased in the United States. This increasing hostility was also prevalent among Black comedians. For example, Dick Gregory and others established their national reputations as comedians commenting on the marginality of Blacks and then appealing to the sense of fair play prevalent in this society. Some comedians (Flip Wilson and Bill Cosby) have continued with this subtle satire while Dick Gregory's humor has gotten more caustic with his growing disillusionment. His humor still lacks, however, the intensity of conflict that is typical of the humor used by revolutionaries like Rap Brown when they address their Black followers. Theirs is a humor which lays bare the hypocrisy of this society's adherence to equality as it also gives Blacks self-confidence.

Arnez and Anthony's article leads one to the conclusion that all Blacks in the United States have sequentially passed through various distinguishable political and economic stages on their way to equality. While it may be possible at a general level to chronicle Blacks' economic and political history, it is difficult to see where one stage leads clearly to another stage. More importantly, the use of humor which is supposed to reflect their economic and political position fails to



support a stage-like progression. Rather it points to two major and overlapping trends in the use of humor by Blacks while the intensity and content of the humor has changed over the years. The first trend is an in-group humor which tells it like it is. The second trend is a more subtle public humor which uses double meanings. Contemporary Black humor is many things; the subtle appeals of comedians like Flip Wilson, the more radical approaches of Dick Gregory and Rap Brown and the assimilationist approach of middle-class Blacks. It would appear that by analyzing the use of humor by Blacks in terms of their economic and political progress, Arnez and Anthony have focused on humor trends which support their conceptualization of the relationship. It would be more profitable for other researchers to think in terms of major but overlapping trends in tracing the use of humor between majority and minority groups over the years.

In focusing on the relationship of Black humor to the economic and political position of Blacks, Arnez and Anthony also fail to explicate consistently the use of humor as an intergroup phenomenon. Blacks have realized that they are not so much fighting an economic and political system but the Whites that control it and that some of those Whites are more their enemies than others (Burma, 1950). Yet, Arnez and Anthony fail to consistently consider the response of Whites to the changing Black-White relationship. During the slavery and Jim Crow periods Whites used stereotypic portrayals of Blacks in an effort to make themselves feel safe and secure in their relationships with a supposedly inferior minority. That this racist humor still exists and appeals to some segments of this society can be seen from the popularity of the television show "Archie Bunker."

A study of the depiction of Blacks in Playboy magazine done by Greenberg and Kahn (1970) suggests another trend in the use of humor by Whites. They found that the assimilation of Blacks into society could be indexed in part by the increasing appearance of humor directed at Blacks in mass media magazines like Playboy. A closer examination of the content of the humor in Playboy magazine, however, led to the finding that although race could be increasingly used as the basis for humor as racial conflict receded, the sexuality of Blacks could not. This finding in a magazine such as Playboy lends strong support to the studies (Kolaja, 1950 and Stephenson, 1951) that found that conflictual issues are not presented in mass media humor.

This review of the use of humor among more physically distinct minority groups suggests that some refinements need to be made in the previous conclusions on the use of humor between majority and minority groups. As previously stated, humor reflects the differing perceptions of groups with different stakes in the majority-minority relationship. Predicting the type of humor a person will use or appreciate, however, does not logically follow from identifying his/her majority or minority group membership. Some minority group members disparage themselves through humor and laugh at majority group humor which disparages them as a means of accommodation. Minority group members may also be oriented toward either the majority or minority culture and their humor will reflect these differing orientations.

The second previously stated conclusion is that the contents and forms of humor change, in as yet unspecified ways, as the majority-minority relationship changes. The additional work done by Arnez and Anthony (1969) points to one clear trend; the public humor of minority

groups is less intense and angry than their private in-group humor which tells it like it is. No study, however, has focused on the use of humor by all parties involved in a majority-minority relationship over time. A study of the use of humor between another majority and minority group (men and women, respectively) over the course of the present women's movement should help clarify various aspects of the use of humor in majority-minority relations.

This discussion of the use of humor between men and women will begin with a brief look at how a majority-minority framework can be applied to the relationship between the sexes.<sup>6</sup> Analysis of the relationship between the sexes as one of majority and minority has been hampered by the lack of a fully applicable theoretical framework on the intergroup level. In 1971 Hochschild reviewed the four main perspectives which had been used to study sex roles; sex differences, sex roles, minority group and the politics of caste. She concluded that some portions of the perspectives could easily include the situation of women while other portions were not at all appropriate for the analysis of women in the United States. Early studies using the majority-minority perspective attempted to draw analogies between the inferior position of women and that of racial minorities. Hacker (1950) found women and Blacks to be similar in the following ways: 1) high social

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<sup>6</sup>Since support of the present women's movement does not clearly divide people along gender lines, a few definitional clarifications need to be made. The term feminist will be used in this study to refer to women who advocate any of a whole range of reforms contained in the present movement for the advancement of women. The term traditional will be used to refer to women who favor little or no change in the societal position of women. The use of the term men in this study will refer to men as a homogeneous group who want to support the status quo which favors their interests as opposed to women's interests. It should be kept in mind, however, that there are also men who favor equality for women.

visibility in terms of physical appearance and dress, 2) ascribed attributes such as stupid, childlike, sexual, and basically inferior, 3) an accommodating attitude and 4) recipients of prejudice and discrimination. Pheterson, Kiesler and Goldberg (1971) have added the similarity in internalization of the inferiority of their group which gets expressed in a self-hate phenomenon.

More recently attempts have been made to apply concepts and theories that evolved from the study of general relations of inequality to research on women. One researcher who did this was Henley (1976). She investigated the verbal and nonverbal behavior of people in different power and status positions to conclude that the interactions between men and women are similar to interactions of people in other high and low status relationships in this society. Berger, Fiske, Norman and Zelditch (1977) reached a similar conclusion in their brief review of the patterned effects of sex and race differences in interaction. In addition, they suggest that sex is a status characteristic such that knowing the sex of a person leads to the formation of performance expectations which get elaborated into a fully developed status structure and so determine the structure of subsequent interactions.

Although this short review suggests that there are several ways in which a majority-minority framework can be applied to the relationship between the sexes, there is also mounting criticism. Since women comprise over half of the population, some sociologists have hesitated to label them a minority. The definition of minority group used in this study, however, says nothing about the size of the groups; for it is relative power, not numbers of people, which is important. Another reservation on the part of some sociologists is the intimate

relationship that some women have with men. Hacker (1951) has noted that even though women are not physically or geographically segregated from men, their physical and social intimacy does not in fact create equal relationships. Other sociologists have suggested that majority and minority be replaced by the terms dominant and subordinate to center attention on the differences in power that differentiate one group from the other. Such a narrow focus seems to me to be undesirable. However, the terms dominant and subordinate actually imply more than a power difference. They include status differentiation as well. According to Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary a dominant group is one who is superior to all others in power or influence while the subordinate group is one that is placed in or occupies a lower class, rank or status in a society. I will continue to use the terms majority and minority recognizing that at least the question of the intimacy of male-female relationships will have to be dealt with eventually. I will, however, also employ the clarification suggested by the ideas of dominance and subordination and define a majority group as a group which uses its superior power and the distinctive cultural characteristics of the minority group to relegate group members to positions relatively low in the status structure in society. Further research will undoubtedly suggest the direction that further conceptual clarification should take.

The little research that has been done on the use of humor by men and women suggests that humor does reflect the structure of the relationship between men and women in this society. On a cultural level, Grotjahn, as presented in Coser (1959), states that the cultural definition of a woman who has a good sense of humor is one who laughs (but not

too loudly) when a man makes a witticism or tells a good joke. The interpersonal relationships of many women have also been characterized by passivity and accommodation. Thorne and Henley (1975) and Weisstein (1973) have commented that some women have an acquiescent and submissive communication style with the smile used to signal that no harm or threat of ill will is intended. Even women's laughter may serve to italicize timidity and feelings of inadequacy. Women have sometimes used humor to excuse the whole majority-minority relationship (Figure A10). Chafe (1973) and French (1977) suggest that the content of the humor used at coffee klatschs in cities and suburbs by women is that husbands, like children, have their eccentricities and women had to put up with them. Even mass media types of humor mirror these same reactions. According to Mano (1975) the comic strip "Blondie" mirrors only some embattled aspects of traditional marriages--Blondie's amused acceptance of Dagwood's failings and Dagwood's teeth-gritting tolerance of Blondie's foibles. Not that women in humor or real life never have any victories such that they are; Blondie gets a new hat, Lois gets the grass cut, or Lucy demoralizes Charlie Brown.

The small amount of mass media humor created by women expresses the same type of relationship. Although there have been cartoons since the 1890s, women cartoonists have only been publishing since the 1940s. By and large the content of women's cartoons conveys the same traditional views of women as portrayed by men cartoonists (Becker, 1959). Levine (1976), in her study of commediennes, concluded that females indulge in self-deprecation humor to a greater extent than do males. Her explanation for this phenomena may apply to women cartoonists as well. She states that they (women) are echoing the values of their

social milieu in order to attract and keep a mass audience. Trilling (1965) suggests an alternative explanation that has been applied to women writers; apparently, the way men write is the more prestigious way to write and the women who would gain a high literary status are constrained to conpire to men's view of the world. Even as late as 1973 Weisstein lamented that she could find no tradition of women using humor as a weapon--recognizing a common oppression, noticing its source and the roles it requires and identifying the agents of that oppression--like that of other oppressed groups. Recent events suggest some new trends with the growth of the current women's movement.

Weisstein (1973) pointed to one new trend in the use of humor by women; they were no longer laughing at jokes against women. Instead women began to create their own humor which was funny because it made the oppression of women by men the target of ridicule. Personally, I have observed a fighting type of humor among friends and acquaintances who are feminists (Figure A14). When Ball (1976) looked at a 1936 and 1972 anthology of jokes to investigate the dominance of male and female characters over time, he found a similar phenomenon; women were increasingly dominant in jokes with a personalistic focus while men were increasingly dominant in jokes with an occupational focus. The use of humor as a weapon was publically heralded by the publication in 1972 of Titters: The First Collection of Humor by Women. It was quickly followed by women cartoonists whose humor, published in feminist magazines, attacked sexism. Even more important was the appearance in the male-dominanted mass media of syndicated comic strips that reflected the changes brought about by women's liberation (Culhane,

1979). First, there was Gary Trudeau's "Doonesbury" in which Ms. Joanie Caucus was a runaway housewife who ended up as a Berkeley law student. "Cathy," one of the few strips about women by a woman, made its publishing debut in 1976. It reflects the many new options women have today. Cathy has a boyfriend named Irving who is an uncompromising chauvinist. She has a best friend named Andrea, who is an uncompromising feminist. She has a traditional Mom named Mom. Irving and Andrea and Mom have different ideas of what a woman should be and Cathy gets torn between the lifestyles (Figure A15).

There are several trends in the use of humor by men which relate to the relationship between the sexes. [There are two points here which need to be clearly distinguished. First, within humor itself men have been found to be dominant. Kramer (1975) in a study of cartoons found women pictured in fewer places than men were. Secondly, in everyday interaction men use humor to control women.] Coser (1959) studied the use of humor among hospital staff members and found that men made more frequent witticisms than women. The same social control strategy has been used by men in mass media humor. Weisstein (1973) suggests that the primary trend in the use of humor by men has been the stereotypic portrayal of women (Figure A8). According to Almquist, Chafetz, Chance and Corder-Bolz (1978) some new stereotypes have appeared with the growth of the present women's movement. These include the ideas that the women's movement is concerned only with the problems of professional women, that it appeals only to white middle-class women, and that feminism among Black and Chicano women would seriously subvert the efforts aimed at achieving racial and ethnic equality. Cole and Robinson (1956) and Rowbotham (1972) state that



previous attempts by women to act outside of their traditional roles immediately led to cartoons which ridiculed the deviant behavior of women. Murray, as presented in Hole and Levin (1971), feels that this ridicule is also present in the current women's movement; feminist claims and symbols have been reinterpreted in a ridiculing way (Figure A9). The underlying assumption of both the stereotypic portrayals and the ridicule would appear to be that feminism is a trivial issue.

This review of the use of humor between men and women suggests that humor does reflect the structure of their relationship in much the same way that the use of humor between majority and minority groups reflects the structure of their relationship. A comparison of the use of humor in the two relationships should suggest similarities and differences not only in the use of humor but in the relationship structures as well. [The type of humor used by many women/minorities suggests that on a general level their positions in society can be characterized as inferior and powerless. On an interpersonal level, women/minorities laugh at men's/majority's humor even when the humor is derogatory of women/minorities. Some of the humor used by women/minorities is also derogatory of their own groups or it has the unintended consequence of excusing the whole male/majority-female/minority relationship.] The same trends were found in some of the mass media types of humor used by women/minorities; the comedy routines of Al Jolson and Phyllis Diller, for example.

[This review of the humor literature has also suggested that although women/minorities use humor as a weapon against men/majority there are differences in the humorous attack.] The use of humor by minority groups has been characterized by (1) personalistic attacks

which showed that members of the majority group were only human and (2) a political awareness of their oppression. [The use of humor by women, however, has typically consisted of only personalistic attacks on men] (e.g., Phyllis Diller's comedy routines or the comic strip "Blondie"). There are several possible explanations for the lack of evidence on the use of a politically aware humor by women. First, the isolation of women on a mass scale may have hampered the development of a political awareness of oppression and oppressors that could have been expressed in humor. Second, it is possible that women did develop humor as a weapon but never used it publicly or were unable to pass it along from generation to generation. Further support for the lack of political awareness explanation can be found among feminists who have developed an awareness of their oppression and a humor to express it. Feminist humor is present in cartoons, comic strips and the comedy routines of a lesbian and Black comedienne. The humor of minority groups, however, has always been in the form of comedy routines and stylized jokes. Additional work needs to be done on the differential use of humor forms by feminists and politically conscious minority group members.

This review of the humor literature also suggests that the use of humor by men and majority groups is similar in that it consists of the following major and overlapping trends: (1) the stereotypic portrayal of women/minorities, (2) the ridicule of deviations from these stereotypes and (3) a change in the content of humor as the male/majority-female/minority relationship changes over time. Finally, the following results that have been found for either men or majority groups could be profitably applied to research on the other group: (1) it has been suggested that at some point in the majority-minority relationship,

majority group members begin to use humor to learn to accept the new role of the minority group, (2) men dominate in their use of humor and (3) when women increase their use of humor in one category, men increase their use of humor in another category.

## HYPOTHESES

In using mass media humor as an indicator of the relationship between majority and minority groups, this study assumes that inferences about society can be made by studying the social artifacts that it produces. One such social artifact is literature (of which humor is a type). Its relationship to society has been variously conceived (Albrecht, 1959). This study assumes that literature reflects the values and beliefs in a complex society. This literature is produced by artists and writers who reflect the views of different groups in society. Each group then responds to the literature and art that confirms its own set of values, customs and beliefs. As such, literature will mirror the norms and values that are common to all groups in society or group differences in society. If these groups are to some extent in conflict, then, we can expect their literature to also reflect this relationship. This assumption is at the core of the sociological analysis of humor.

Sociological analysis of humor has focused on the social function of humor in majority-minority relationships. The majority group evaluates the characteristics of their own group positively and those of the minority group negatively. The majority group claims that the minority group is inferior and uses this claim to deny them access to the privileges and advantages available in society. When an awareness occurs among members of the minority group that their low status is

unjust, they have often attempted to change the relationship of inequality. These attempts have been met with strong resistance from the majority group which attempts to maintain its positive distinctiveness from the minority group and to preserve or restore its superiority. Consequently, the relationship between the majority and the minority group will be conflictual.

As the conflict between the majority and the minority group increases it has consequences for the larger society. There are societal mechanisms that are designed to control the level of conflict in society. One such mechanism is the use of humor among subgroups in society. The use of humor between the subgroups is an institutionalized provision for the release of hostilities and tensions. As such humor contains more or less well concealed malice so that an analysis of the content of humor should be particularly revealing of the tensions and attitudes that may not be expressed in other ways. More specifically, the majority group will use humor to stress adherence to traditional cultural definitions of the minority group and ridicule deviations from these definitions. Another strategy is to stress societal cohesiveness by ignoring or playing down the conflict between majority and minority groups in society. The minority group, however, uses humor to gain ascendancy or temporary advantage over the majority group. The more conflictual the relationship between the majority and the minority group in society, the more pronounced should be the use of each category of humor described above. Also the humor of each of the parties involved in the majority-minority relationship, like literature more generally, is presented to audiences which are similar and can best appreciate it. Consequently, the humor which appeals to each party in

the majority-minority relationship should appear more frequently in mass media that is oriented toward that particular subgroup. Given changes in the amount of conflict in a majority-minority relationship, the use of humor as described above should reflect these changes.

For the purposes of this study men and women, respectively, are considered as a majority and a minority group. Given the previous conceptualization of the majority-minority relationship, the relationship between men and women should also be conflictual. More specifically, it can be shown that changes have occurred in the amount of conflict between men and women and crystalized in the current women's movement.

#### The Rise of Conflict Between Men and Women Since 1920

World War I occurred during the end of the Women's Suffrage Movement which created societal upheaval of its own. Many women put aside their campaign for the vote to help in the war effort. Women in steadily increasing numbers entered "men's" fields and were highly satisfactory workers. In their homes women learned to hammer a nail and replace a blown fuse. Yet, when the men returned, women were dismissed from their jobs. They lost not only their wages but the social status associated with a paying job. Those women whose husbands returned were faced with the challenges of domesticity. Those women whose husbands did not return fought to retain their jobs. They encountered unequal pay and discrimination. On top of these post-war adjustments, the Women's Suffrage Movement succeeded in getting Congress to pass the Twenty-first Amendment in 1920.

After securing the vote in 1920, women failed to use it in their own behalf. More important, the cohesion generated by the suffrage

movement disintegrated after the vote was won. Women again become polarized into two opposing camps, this time the disputed issue centering on the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) proposed by the National Women's Party in 1923. The radical feminists envisioned the ERA as a way of achieving total equality for women and an end to discrimination. The social feminists, seeking broad social reforms, contended that women were weaker than men, belonged in the home, and required protective legislation. Along with other social factors this social feminist view helped reinforce an ideology that women, due to biological differences, best served as wives, mothers and homemakers (O'Neill, 1969).

Two events, the Depression of the thirties and World War II, added to the difficulty of clearly defining the "women problem." The increase between 1930 and 1940 in the labor force participation rate of women was due mainly to the employment of young, single women (Maupin, 1974). Men jealously guarded their cultural definition as "breadwinner" while twenty-six states passed laws prohibiting the employment of married women. For middle-class women, then, the roles of paid worker and homemaker remained separated. Still the employment rate of married women rose from 11.7 percent to 15.2 percent as financially desperate minority women went to work (Ryan, 1975).

Then came World War II when women were needed by industry. Those women who were already employed moved out of the tertiary sector into industry. Of the new workers entering the labor force, seventy-five percent were married and sixty percent were over thirty-five years of age (Ferriss, 1974). The pay was good, especially because of overtime; and women read and heard about their remarkable abilities, their strength, ingenuity, resourcefulness and courage in learning quickly to

work like a man. But at the end of the war, when employers wanted to get rid of women workers, the message changed. It was claimed that women really did not like to work outside their home. Not that they could not, not that they should not, but that they preferred the creative occupation of full-time homemaker; raising children, washing dishes, mopping floors and doing the family wash. Young, married women did just that but retained the knowledge and pride of what they had accomplished. Many single women, however, stayed in the labor force, but not in their war jobs. They returned, often under protest, to the laundries, the eating and drinking establishments, domestic service, and clerical work. Only women with technical or professional training clung tenaciously to their trades. There was also a continued post-war increase in the labor force participation rate of women due to the supply of older, married women. Carefully avoiding these facts, the media continued to pour out happy homemaker tales from the end of the war right through the 1950s.

During the 1950s the "happy homemakers" grew disillusioned. Earlier marriages, deurbanization, economic prosperity, lower birthrates and an emphasis on peer group independence challenged the existing familial ties and roles of men and women. In 1964, for the first time, the number of women seeking psychiatric treatment and institutional help dwarfed that of men (Chesler, 1972). In addition the divorce rate skyrocketed. Or, more accurately, it peaked and leveled off right after the war in 1946, then during the mid-fifties rose to the highest height it had ever been up until that time (Jacobson, 1959). As divorced women reconsidered their roles as wives, mothers and



housekeepers, they joined other women who had found it advantageous to return to school and work.

The number of working women doubled between 1940 and 1960 and again, for the first time, the majority did not come from the lower classes (Ryan, 1975). As to education, from 1950 onward there has been a very rapid expansion of the number of educated women (Howard, 1974). These educated women found, however, that although they made the same investment in time, energy and intellect in schooling as men did, the payoff was not commensurate. Between 1940 and 1968 the percentage of women employed in all major occupational categories except that of professional and technical workers, rose (Freeman, 1975). Like World War II, women were again working around men with whom they could compare their skills and wages. Unlike World War II, the 1960s women had the education and so the ability to articulate and disseminate their grievances (Howard, 1974).

In 1963 Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique gave voice to the murmurings of discontent from suburbia and beyond. This discontent later focused on the administration of laws against sex discrimination in employment as stated in Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. At the third National Conference on the Status of Women, several women proposed a resolution that the Equal Opportunity Commission should treat sex discrimination seriously. The resolution never reached the floor. The few women that were in favor of the resolution met in Betty Friedan's room and the National Organization of Women (NOW) was quietly founded.

Younger women activists also became interested in women's liberation groups due to their experiences in the radical movements of the

1960s. When these women were told they could best help by making coffee and typing letters, their awareness of the incongruity between these activities and the movements' rhetorics grew. After repeated attempts to bring up the issue of their roles in the movements, several women began using the skills they had learned in the radical movements. Soon college students, housewives and other women across the nation were organized into consciousness raising groups.

This brief review of the changes in the relationship between men and women shows the emergence of more explicit conflict from the 1950s onward. According to Ferriss (1975) this conflict has centered on issues that have been troublesome for women throughout this century: 1) the educational level of women has been increasing, thereby improving their employability, 2) a greater demand for certain categories of workers has led to the increasing employment of women, 3) discrimination in the workplace with women more often found in dead-end and low-paying jobs, 4) the difficulties of combining a career, marriage and children, 5) the disparity between legislative and actual equality, and 6) women's growing independence as evidenced by a) an increase in the proportion of single women and b) mainly due to divorce, a quite rapid increase since 1960 in the percent of families and households with female heads. All these issues are bound to cause strains in many marriages. The additional effect of these issues on some marriages may result in so many tensions that they end in divorce. Support for this supposition is graphically presented in Figure 2. It shows that there is a close correspondence between the labor force participation rate of women and the divorce rate from 1890 to the present. The increasing ease of obtaining a divorce and the growing economic independence of women

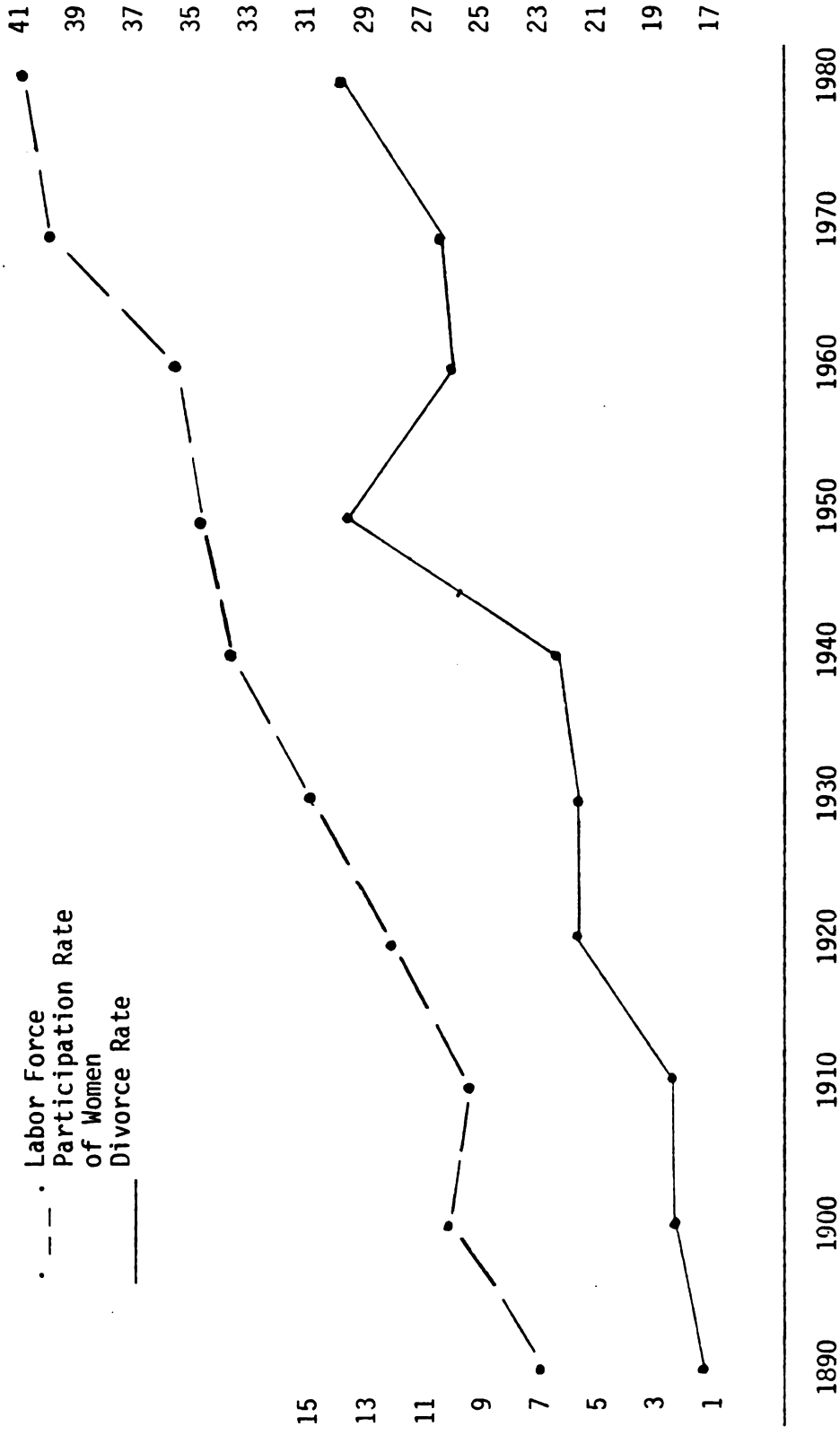


Figure 2. A graph of the labor force participation rate of women versus the divorce rate from 1890 to 1975.

SOURCE: The data used in this graph was compiled by the author from the Statistical Abstract of the United States.

makes divorce an even more likely alternative. Consequently, the divorce rate will be used as the indicator of conflict between the sexes.

Previous research on the use of humor by majority and minority groups has focused on the use of humor by minority groups to express conflict and the various uses of humor by the majority group to exercise social control as though they were three unrelated phenomena. This has led, then, to the separate conclusions that an increase in the conflict between majority and minority groups results in an increase in the use of humor that is characteristic of each of these groups. Since there is a finite amount of humor which is present at any given time, however, each of these conclusions cannot be simultaneously true. Given the present state of the literature it is unclear which of the categories of humor will increase when all the categories are tested in one study. Therefore, the prediction was made for this study that the increase in societal conflict between men and women since 1950 should be reflected in an increase in humor by women that expresses the conflict in the relationship between the sexes and an increase in humor by men which expresses social control of women and social disregard of the societal conflict between the sexes. Therefore:

- H<sub>1</sub>: The amount of conflict between the sexes in humor increases as the divorce rate increases.
- H<sub>2</sub>: The amount of social control of women in humor increases as the divorce rate increases.
- H<sub>3</sub>: The amount of social disregard of the conflict between the sexes in humor increases as the divorce rate increases.

Previous research has also shown that humor, as a literature form, is produced by artists and writers who reflect the views of different groups in society. Each group then responds to the

humor that confirm its own set of values, customs and beliefs.

Therefore:

- H<sub>4</sub>: The relative frequency of humor in the conflict category will be greater in humor sources intended for female audiences than in humor sources intended for general audiences and greater in humor sources for general audiences than in humor sources intended for male audiences.
- H<sub>5</sub>: The relative frequency of humor in the social control category will be greater in humor sources intended for male audiences than in humor sources intended for general audiences and greater in humor sources intended for general audiences than in humor sources intended for female audiences.
- H<sub>6</sub>: The relative frequency of humor in the social disregard category will be greater in humor sources intended for general audiences than in humor sources intended for male audiences and greater in humor sources intended for male audiences than in humor sources intended for female audiences.

## METHODOLOGY

The proper method for analyzing a sample of cultural artifacts such as cartoons is content analysis. As defined by Holsti (1954, p. 601) content analysis, "is any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages." Berelson (1952) would add the following assumptions: 1) content analysis assumes that inferences about a relationship between intent and content or between content and effect can validly be made, and 2) content analysis assumes that the "meanings" ascribed to the content correspond to the "meaning" intended by the communicator or understood by the audience.

In describing the content of messages, three basic types of comparisons can be made, two of which are appropriate to this study. First, comparisons can be made of different sources over time for the purpose of relating theoretically significant attributes of communication sources to differences in the messages they produce. Secondly, one can analyze the content in order to make inferences about the causes or antecedents of the message. This comparison has been used most often in studies that attempt to get at the spirit of a past age--attitudes, interests, values or mores of a population.

### Definitions

The following terms were operationally defined: (1) a societal indicator of conflict, (2) a source of mass media humor, (3) a form of

mass media humor and (4) specific categories of mass media humor. For the purposes of this study the societal indicator of conflict--divorce--is defined as the act by which any marriage is dissolved in a way other than through the death of one of the spouses, so that the parties are free to remarry after a certain period of time. Included in the divorce statistics used for this study are annulments, where a competent authority declares that a marriage is void. The specific rate used in this study was the standardized divorce rate.<sup>7</sup>

Magazines were chosen as a source of mass media humor because they are original sources of that humor and are distinguishable in terms of the subgroups that are being studied in this research. There are three major types of mass media humor; cartoons, written or verbal jokes and comedy routines. Cartoons were selected over jokes because they are a familiar type of humor. There are several other reasons why cartoons were selected. According to Becker (1959, p. VII) cartoons appear to be topical; "cartoons dramatize the issues and attitudes of the day, and cartoon characters reflect the role expectations held by the public for a person or group of people . . . it is cartoonists who hold to light the faults and failings and who point up the fads, foibles that amuse and worry society." Cartoons can accomplish this function because they dramatically cut through defenses, making people laugh before they realize the point of the cartoon.

The functions of cartoon humor in the relationship between the sexes is conceptualized in terms of three categories. The use of humor

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<sup>7</sup>The standardized divorce rate is computed as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Number of Divorces in a given year}}{1000 \text{ married couples}}$$

by women to show antagonism towards men and to stress women's equality with men is defined as conflict. The use of humor by men to stress adherence to traditional cultural definitions of women and to ridicule deviations from these stereotypes is defined as social control. The use of humor by men which socially redefines the conflict between men and women as insignificant so that it can be disregarded is defined as social disregard.<sup>8</sup>

### Sample

Magazine cartoons were selected for this study in the following manner. To choose the most popular magazines, I obtained a list of the leading U.S. magazines for each year from the World Almanac.<sup>9</sup> These statistics are provided by the Audit Bureau of Circulation and are based on the average circulation per issue. I selected general, men's and women's magazines as categorized by the type of reading audience.<sup>10</sup> I then checked each magazine for the inclusion of cartoons until there were five magazines in each category. One magazine per category and year was then selected with the use of a table of random numbers. All

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<sup>8</sup>Social disregard was originally presented in the text as the social redefinition of conflict in society as a minor issue which need not be mentioned or which could be presented as amusing human failings. The social disregard category of humor used in this study, however, measures only the failure to mention or disregard aspect of this discussion. The other aspect, that conflict can be presented as nothing more serious than human failings was measured in the "traditional use" versus the "fighting back" subcategories of conflict humor.

<sup>9</sup>Using circulation to select the most popular magazines led to the inclusion in the sample of a disproportionately large number of middle-class magazines. Given Albrecht's (1959) findings that literature is created by and for specific audiences I would expect these results to apply mainly to the middle-class.

<sup>10</sup>Katz (1972) and Ulrich (1932) were consulted as an aid in correctly categorizing the magazines used in this study.



twelve issues of a magazine per year were used. One issue per month of magazines that were published more than once a month was selected with the use of a table of random numbers. A list of the magazines that were used in this study is presented in Appendix B.

The first step in selecting cartoons was to count the total number of cartoons in each magazine issue.<sup>11</sup> A table of random numbers was used to select three cartoons from each issue of the magazines that were sampled for this study. Regular and special cartoon features were excluded from the sample. An example of the former is Good Housekeeping's "Light Housekeeping" feature; the latter are features that are included in magazines around the holidays.

### Coding

Once the sample has been selected, one must decide how to code the documents. Coding is the process whereby raw data are systematically transformed and aggregated into units which permit precise description of relevant content categories. This involved several decisions. The first is the designation of the unit of analysis. Since cartoons are a self-contained meaning unit the whole cartoon was analyzed. Second, relevant content categories were selected; the conflict, social control and social disregard categories of humor. The specific coding scheme used in this study is presented in Appendix A.

The three judges used in this study were undergraduate students at Michigan State University and Saginaw Valley State College. Several

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<sup>11</sup>There were distinct differences in the number of cartoons contained in the different categories of magazines; women's magazines contained on the average of two to five cartoons per issue; general magazines, ten to twenty; and men's magazines, twenty to thirty. This differential inclusion of humor in magazines needs to be investigated.

training sessions were conducted by the experimenter to familiarize the coders with the coding scheme. Since this study is concerned with the conflict between men and women in society, the cartoons were first coded separately by a male and a female student. An intercoder correlation was then run on this coding. An agreement rate of .76 was found. In order to simplify the data analysis, a second female student recoded the cartoons on which the original two coders had disagreed.<sup>12</sup> The data were then recoded to reflect the agreement among two of the three coders.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>There is a possible bias in this study due to the effect of having two female coders and only one male coder. Seventy-one percent of the disagreements between the male and the female coder were decided by the second female coder in favor of the first female coder.

<sup>13</sup>Since there were still twenty-five cartoons that no two of the three coders coded in the same category, the data was analyzed with the disagreement cases both included and excluded. Little difference was found in the two sets of data. The data that includes the disagreement cases is presented in the tables in the text. The corresponding tables in Appendix D contain the data that excludes the disagreement cases.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The relationship between the sexes has mainly been defined and controlled by men who characterize women as inferior, assign them a lower status and then discriminate against them. This relationship has consequences for men, women and the larger society of which they are a part that gets expressed in humor. The intent of some of the humor used by men is social control of women through stereotypic portrayal, ridicule of deviations from these stereotypes and disregard of the conflict between men and women in society. Women, however, use humor to gain a temporary advantage while expressing their antagonism towards men. It was previously shown that the conflict between men and women has increased since the 1950s while previous research on humor has shown an increase in the characteristic use of each group's humor as the conflict between the groups increases. Therefore it was hypothesized that:

- H<sub>1</sub>: The amount of conflict between the sexes in cartoons has increased as the divorce rate increases.
- H<sub>2</sub>: The amount of social control of women in cartoons increases as the divorce rate increases.
- H<sub>3</sub>: The amount of social disregard of the conflict between the sexes in cartoons increases as the divorce rate increases.

The data used to test H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>, and H<sub>3</sub> are presented in Table 1. It shows the following trends: 1) the percent of humor in the conflict category was higher in 1955, 1965 and 1975 than it was in 1950, 1960 and 1970; 2) the percent of humor in the social control category was

TABLE 1

The Percent of Cartoons Coded in Each Humor Category and the Divorce Rate by Five Year Intervals

Year	Humor Categories and Divorce Rate			
	Percent of Conflict Humor	Percent of Social Control Humor	Percent of Social Disregard Humor	Divorce Rate
1950	14.4	33.4	52.2	2.6
1955	19.0	29.7	51.3	2.3
1960	7.9	40.2	51.9	2.2
1965	11.6	29.2	59.2	2.5
1970	8.3	28.2	63.5	3.5
1975	9.3	25.5	65.2	4.9

higher in 1950 and 1960 than it was in 1955 with a steady decrease from 1965 onward, 3) the percent of humor in the social disregard category was lower in 1955 then it was in 1950 with a steady increase from 1960 onward, and 4) the divorce rate was lower in 1955 and 1960 than it was in 1950 with a steady increase from 1965 onward. The results from Table 1 show that the most consistent and similar trends are those of the social disregard category of humor and the divorce rate. This conclusion was tested by running a product moment correlation between all three categories of humor and the divorce rate. The results of these correlations are presented in Table 2. No support was found for  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  since the conflict and social control categories of humor were negatively correlated with the divorce rate. In order to aid the following discussion the results that pertain to  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  are graphically presented in Figure 3. The higher negative correlation between the percent of humor in the conflict category and the divorce rate appears to be a result of the polar opposite switches in the percent of

TABLE 2

Pearson's R's for the Percent of Cartoons Coded in Each Humor Category and the Divorce Rate

	Humor Categories		
	Conflict	Social Control	Social Disregard
r	-.68	-.41	+.60

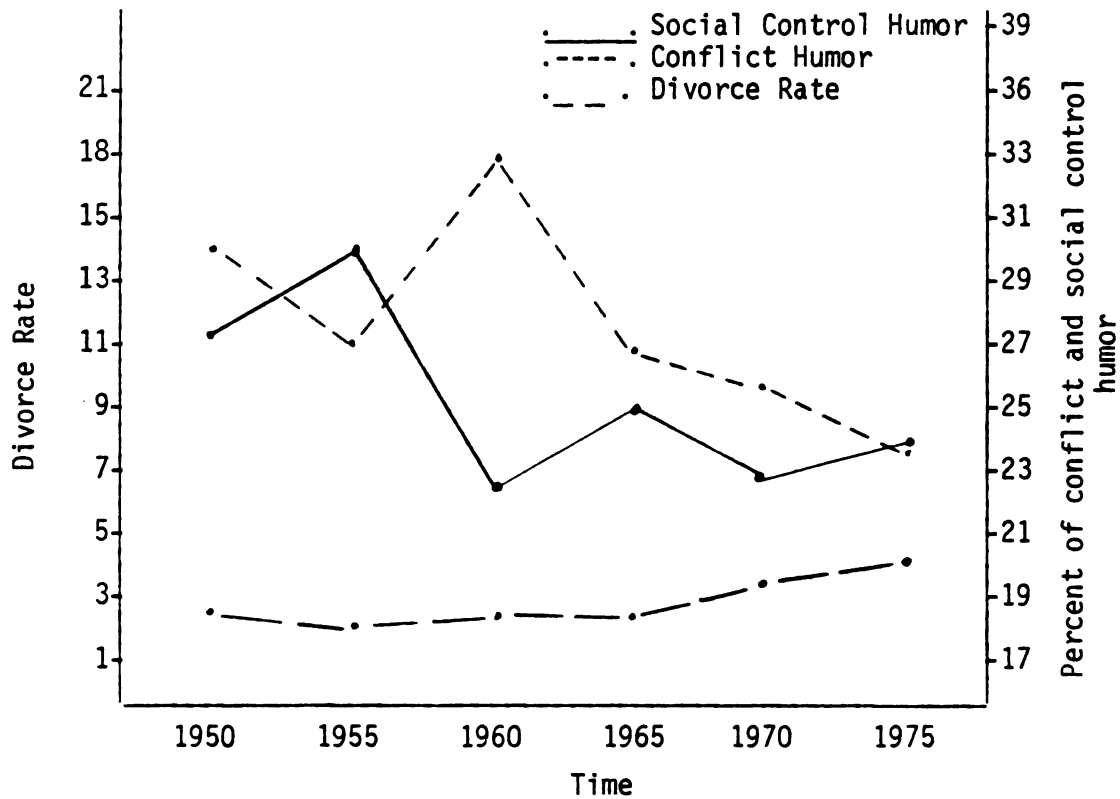


Figure 3. Percent of humor in the conflict and social control categories versus the divorce rate from 1950 to 1975.

humor in the conflict category every five years. Although the negative correlation between the percent of humor in the social control category and the divorce rate was less strong than the previous correlation, the same reasons may apply since the percent of humor in the social control category shows no consistent trend until 1965. There are several

possible explanations for these results. Attempts were made to account for these trends by comparing both categories with the significant events in the present women's movement, the social unrest of the 1960s and general U.S. history. None of these events consistently accounted for the ups and downs in either category. One explanation is, then, that in sampling only every five years I have missed a lot of the significant events in the women's movement that may have caused an immediate but temporary upswing in the percent of both conflict and social control humor in the mass media. Secondly, the percent of conflict and social control humor in the mass media may be subject to popularity cycles similar to those found with fads and fashions. One category of humor is popular for several years and then replaced by the other category of humor when either editors, cartoonists or the public expresses a need for a change.

The overall sample does show support for  $H_3$ . As the results from Table 2 suggested there is a fairly high positive correlation between the social disregard category of humor and the divorce rate. The results pertaining to  $H_3$  are graphically presented in Figure 4. There are several possible explanations for the strong position correlation between the percent of humor in the social disregard category and the divorce rate. First, given the mutually exclusive nature of the humor categories and the negative correlations between the percent of humor in the conflict and the social control categories of humor and the divorce rate, the third correlation had to be positive. Secondly, this result lends support to the studies that suggest that public humor is usually sanitized (Arnez and Anthony, 1969) and that there is adherence in mass media humor to the disregard of conflict (Stephenson, 1951 and Kolaja, 1950).

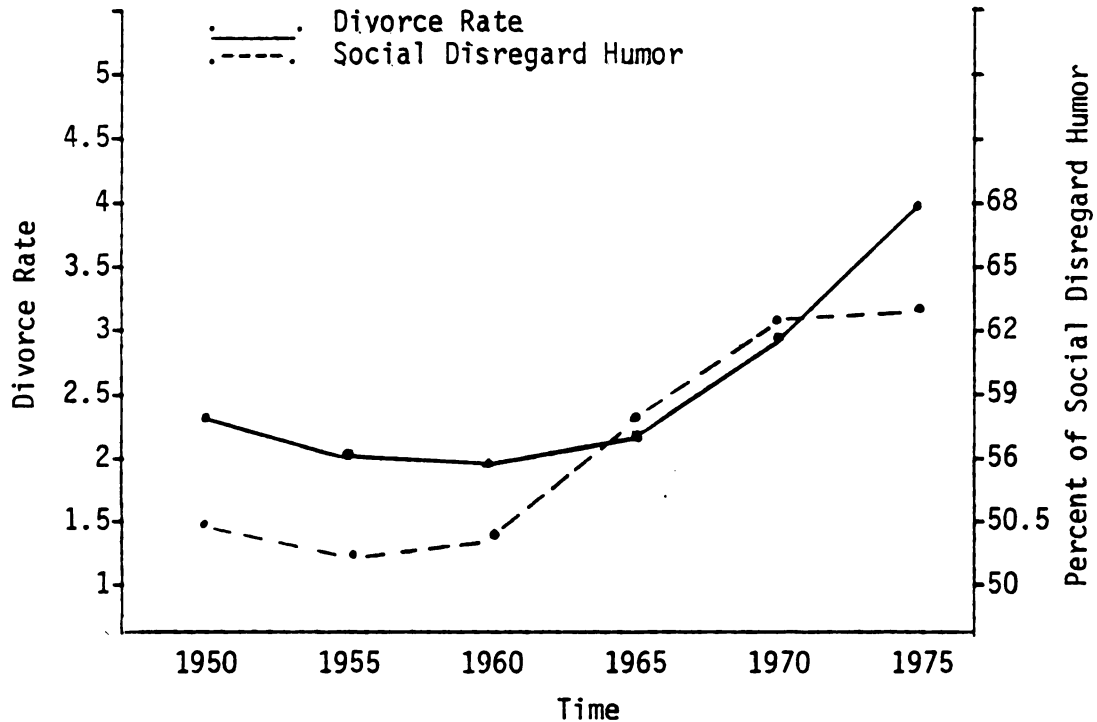


Figure 4. Percent of humor in the social disregard category versus the divorce rate from 1950 to 1975

Previous research in the sociology of literature and the sociology of humor literature has shown that humor is produced by people who are members of and so reflect the views of different groups in society. Men and women respond, then, to the mass media that confirms their own views of the relationship between the sexes. Therefore it was hypothesized that:

- H<sub>4</sub>: The relative frequency of humor in the conflict category will be greater in women's magazines than in general magazines and greater in general magazines than in men's magazines.
- H<sub>5</sub>: The relative frequency of humor in the social control category will be greater in men's magazines than in general magazines and greater in general magazines than in women's magazines.
- H<sub>6</sub>: The relative frequency of humor in the social disregard category will be greater in general magazines than in men's magazines and greater in men's magazines than in women's magazines.

TABLE 3

The Percent of Cartoons in Magazines Coded as in Each Humor Category

Humor Category	Magazine Category		
	General	Women's	Men's
Conflict	10.2	18.3	6.8
Social Control	28.2	31.0	33.7
Social Disregard	61.6	50.7	59.5

Table 3 presents the data that were used to test  $H_4$ ,  $H_5$  and  $H_6$ . The results were as follows: (1) the percent of humor in the conflict category was higher in women's magazines than in general magazines and higher in general magazines than in men's magazines, (2) the percent of humor in the social control category was higher in men's magazines than in women's magazines and higher in women's magazines than in general magazines and (3) the percent of humor in the social disregard category is higher in general magazines than in men's magazines and higher in men's magazines than in women's magazines. The data strongly support  $H_4$  and  $H_6$  while providing only weak support for  $H_5$  since there is a higher percent of social control humor in women's magazines than in general magazines. There are several possible explanations for these results. First, the number of cartoons in traditional women's magazines is so small that few trends could be observed. Another reason for this result may be the increasingly schizophrenic task of women's magazines (e.g., Good Housekeeping and Ladies Home Journal) that attempted to appeal to both traditional women and the growing number of feminists. If this is true then there should have been an increase in humor oriented toward feminists from 1950 to 1975. Since the data



needed to test these conclusions was available a post-hoc investigation was conducted on the conflict humor subcategories. The results presented in Tables C1 through C4 show no consistent relationship when the subcategories were compared with each other (Table C1), over time (Table C2), by magazine category (Table C3) and by magazine category over time (Table C4). It is also possible, then, that humor that would appeal to feminists began to appear in the feminist publications in the 1970s. Several feminist magazines (Ms, New Woman and Playgirl) were initially selected for this study based on their popularity. They had to be dropped from the study, however, because as of 1975 they did not contain humor. Playgirl and New Woman, at least reading, now contain on the average of between ten and fifteen cartoons per issue. This suggests that additional work needs to be done on feminist magazines to decide if the respective use of humor was and is due to editorial policies and/or a previous lack of cartoonists with a feminist perspective. It would also be interesting to look at the reasons why Ms, and Women's Day magazines still do not contain humor and why other women's magazines (e.g., Good Housekeeping) include only two to five cartoons as fillers per issue.

As previously mentioned, the two dominant social control strategies used by men in humor are stereotypic portrayals of women and ridicule of deviations from these stereotypes. The observation made by Cole and Robinson (1956) and Rowbotham (1972), however, was that the ridicule of women in cartoons was an immediate response to the previous attempts by women to challenge their traditional roles. This observation suggested that there might be a differential use of ridicule and stereotypes of women by men. Since the data needed to test this

assumption was available in the "women stereotyped" and the "ridicule of libbers" social control subcategories, a post-hoc investigation was conducted. The results showed that the percent of humor in the "women stereotyped" subcategory accounted for eighty-seven percent of the humor while the "ridicule of libbers" subcategory accounted for only thirteen percent of the humor in the social control category (Table C2). Again no consistent trends were found for either subcategory over time (Table C4). Since no systematic study has been done on the use of both stereotypic portrayal and ridicule in humor together, it is possible that the ridicule response to the earlier women's movement was over reported. It is also possible that there are differences between the women's movements that have occurred in this century that account for the differences in the use of ridicule. More specifically, cartoonists who ridiculed previous women's movements could focus on a single cohesive issue (e.g., bloomers or suffrage) which was amenable to the art of cartooning. The current women's movement, however, is concerned with a myriad of issues (e.g., abortion, lesbianism, equal pay for equal work) which may also be more difficult to capture in a cartoon.

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## APPENDICES



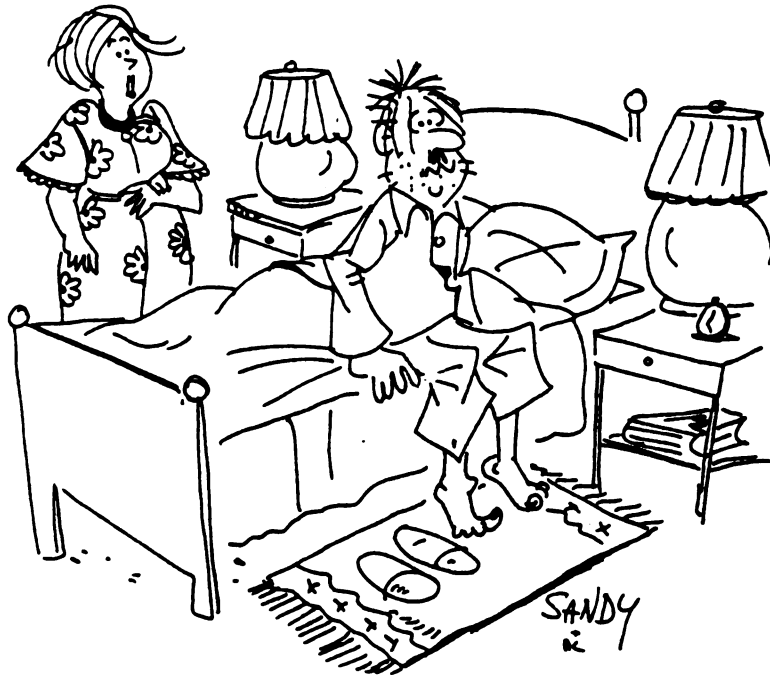
APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A  
CODING INSTRUCTIONS

	RIDICULER	TARGET OF RIDICULE
CONFLICT	Women or others who represent the views of women	Men or others who represent the views of men
SOCIAL CONTROL	Men or others who represent the views of men	Women or others who represent the views of women
SOCIAL REDEFINITION AND DISREGARD		

Figure A1. How humor functions as conflict, social control and social disregard in the relationship between the sexes.

CONFLICT: The use of humor by women to express antagonism towards men and adherent to group norms. There are three subcategories of humor in the conflict category: 1) the "traditional use" of humor by women which portrays men stereotypically, 2) a "fighting back" humor in which women outwit men and 3) the use of humor by others who represent the "liberated views" of women.

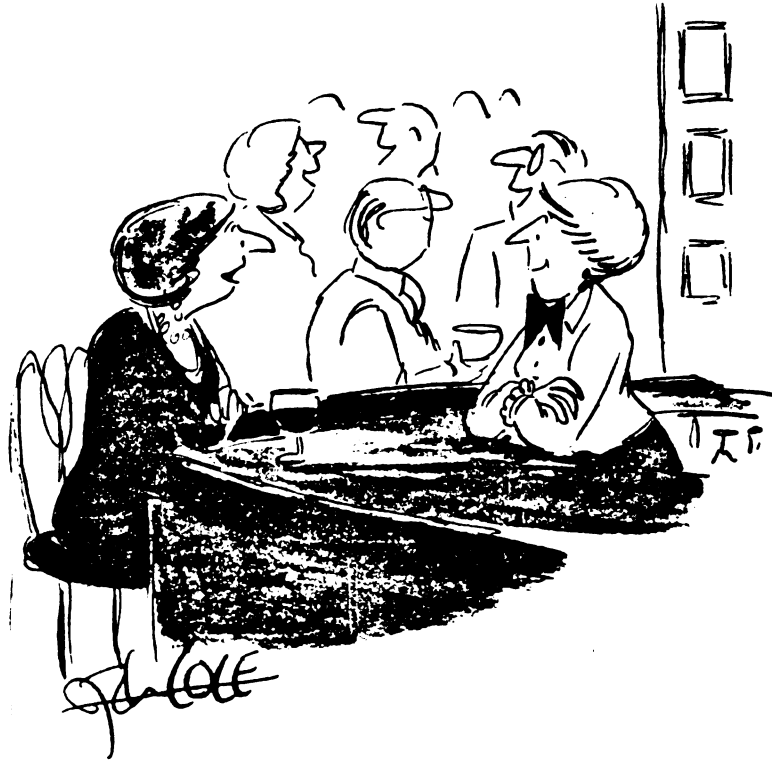


**"If someone should happen to ask me what I see in you,  
what should I tell them?"**

Figure A2. An example of cartoon humor which depicts the traditional stereotypic portrayal of men and women.

SOURCE: The New Woman March-April, 1978.

The more common stereotypic portrayals of men by women are the following: uncommunicative, incompetent, lazy, physically weak, clumsy, childish, dominated, cheap, physically undesirable, messy, unromantic.



**"I'm married. I have three sons. My boss is a man.  
I sell Jockey shorts. And I just need a woman to talk to!"**

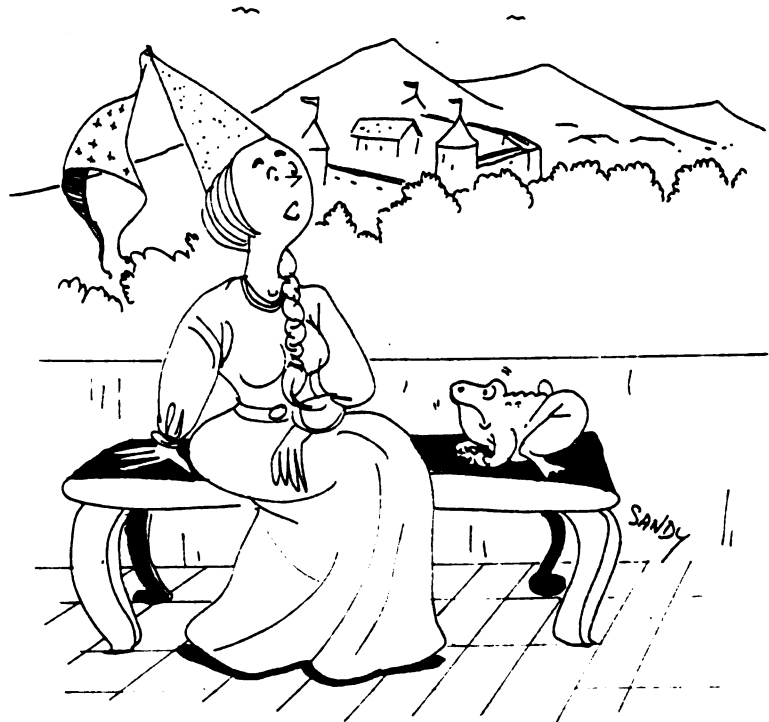
Figure A3. An example of cartoon humor which depicts personal salvation within the minority group.

SOURCE: The New Woman November-December, 1979.



**"Actually, I didn't lose them ... I sold them for \$200 and bought a bull for \$95. I sold the stud services of the bull to ten farmers for \$225 each, then ..."**

Figure A4. An example of cartoon humor which depicts trickster motifs.  
SOURCE: The New Woman July-August, 1979.



**“Okay, so you’re a rich, handsome prince . . . that still doesn’t tell me why I should KISS you.”**

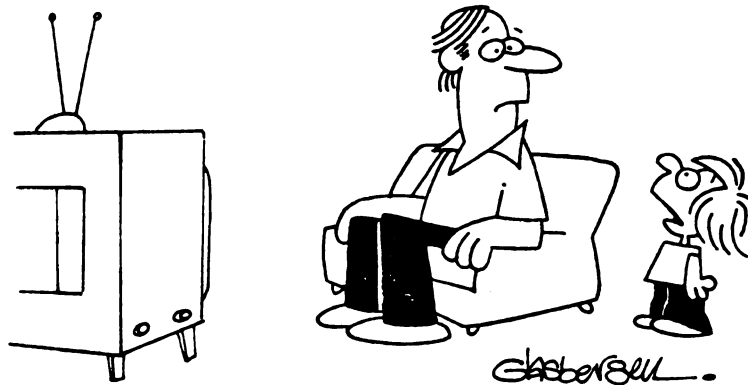
Figure A5. An example of cartoon humor which depicts parody of alleged somatic or cultural stereotype.

SOURCE: The New Woman November-December, 1979.



**"Mr. Dumbkauf, you think a woman shouldn't be President  
because her menstrual cycle would make her act crazy  
and want to declare war on somebody?  
Gee, I'm in my cycle right now — as are millions of other women.  
Can you explain why we're not all out in the street  
stabbing, shooting and setting fire to people?"**

Figure A6. An example of cartoon humor which depicts a rigorous following of majority group logic to an unexpected conclusion.  
SOURCE: The New Woman January-February, 1978.

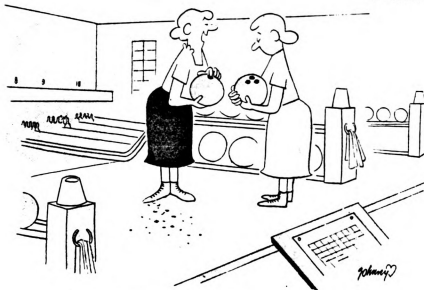


**"Miss America had to show herself in a bathing suit before she  
got chosen to be the country's ambassador of good will.  
How come Andrew Young got to be an ambassador  
without showing himself in a bathing suit?"**

Figure A7. An example of cartoon humor which depicts feminist views.  
SOURCE: The New Woman July-August, 1979.



**SOCIAL CONTROL:** The use of humor by men to portray women stereotypically and ridicule women's deviations from their traditional roles.



"Put your fingers in its eyes and your thumb in its mouth."

Figure A8. An example of cartoon humor which portrays women stereotypically.

SOURCE: True December, 1950.

The more common stereotypes are as follows: politically unaware, not worldly, physically weak, no good at sports, talkative, gossips, nags, critical, bad drivers, vain, always need money, fond of presents, anxious to be married, attracted to rich and/or goodlooking men, romantic, soft-hearted, sentimental, stupid, silly, bad cooks, sex objects, sexually passive, harassed mothers, housewives, mechanically inept.



Figure A9. An example of cartoon humor which ridicules women who challenge their traditional role.

SOURCE: Ms September, 1979.



Figure A10. An example of cartoon humor which depicts collective surreptitious approbation of men by women.

SOURCE: Penthouse April, 1970.

SOCIAL DISREGARD: The redefinition of conflict between men and women in society to the level of a minor squabble so that it can be disregarded in humor.



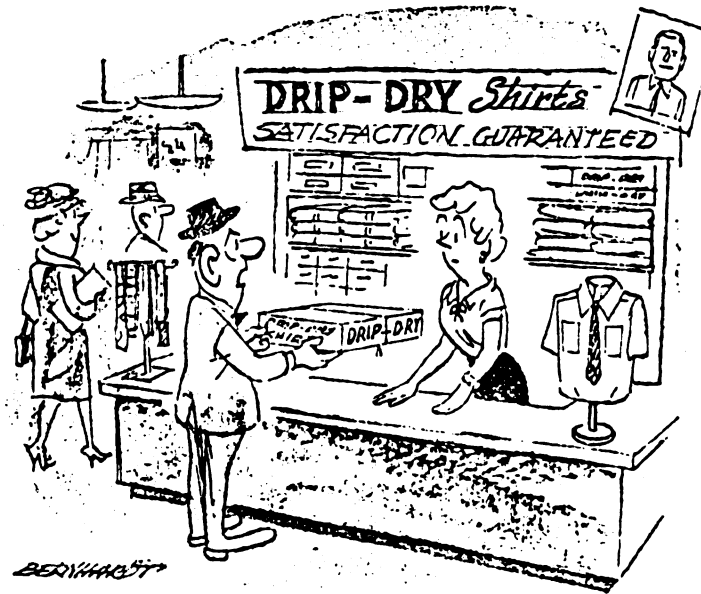
Drawing by Wm. Hamilton; © 1973 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

*'Nice day? What the hell do you mean, 'Nice day? Haven't you read the Wall Street Journal this morning?'*

Figure A11. An example of cartoon humor which would be considered social disregard.

SOURCE: The New Yorker Magazine  
June, 1973.

Men and women who are in an occupational relationship belong in this category. A good way to decide whether or not the cartoon would be included is to replace the sex of the target of the ridicule. In the cartoon below the point would be the same whether the characters were a female clerk and a male customer or vice versa.



*"It's that drip, drip, drip—it's driving me nuts!"*

Figure A12. An example of cartoon humor that would be included in the social disregard category.

SOURCE: McCalls November, 1970.

NOTE: Animals which are portrayed as men or women as a part of this study.



Figure A13. An example of cartoon humor which portrays animals as men and women.  
SOURCE: Good Housekeeping December, 1971.

The feminist who was giving a speech in support of the Equal Rights Amendment was interrupted by the deep voice of a heckler from the crowd:  
 "Don't you wish you were a man?"  
 "No," she replied without missing a beat. "How about you?"

Figure A14. An example of a feminist joke.  
 SOURCE: Psychology Today  
 January, 1979.



Figure A15. An example of the comic strip "Cathy."  
 SOURCE: Detroit Free Press March 14, 1980.

## APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

A LIST OF THE MAGAZINES USED IN THIS STUDY

	1950	1955
GENERAL	Saturday Evening Post	Rotarian
MEN'S	Argosy	True
WOMEN'S	Women's Home Companion	Ladies Home Journal
	1960	1965
GENERAL	Look	New Yorker
MEN'S	Playboy	Esquire
WOMEN'S	McCalls	Family Circle
	1970	1975
GENERAL	Elks	Saturday Review
MEN'S	Penthouse	Playboy
WOMEN'S	Good Housekeeping	Ladies Home Journal



## APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C

TABLES WITH DATA BY SUBCATEGORY

TABLE C1

The Percent of Cartoons Coded in the Conflict and Social Control Humor Subcategories

Percentages	Humor Category				
	Conflict			Social Control	
	Fighting Back	Liberated Views	Traditional Use	Women Stereotyped	Ridicule of "Libbers"
Frequency of cartoons by subcategory	60	24	65	348	54
Percent of subcategory	.40	.16	.44	.87	.13
Percent of total	.05	.02	.05	.27	.04

TABLE C2

The Percent of Cartoons Coded in the Conflict and Social Control Humor Subcategories by Five Year Intervals

Year	Humor Category				
	Conflict			Social Control	
	Fighting Back	Traditional Use	Liberated Views	Women Stereotyped	Ridicule of "Libbers"
1950	5.6	1.4	7.4	26.9	6.5
1955	6.5	.9	11.6	27.8	1.9
1960	3.7	.5	3.7	37.0	3.2
1965	4.2	4.2	3.2	29.2	--
1970	4.6	2.8	.9	24.5	3.7
1975	4.6	1.9	2.8	16.7	8.8

TABLE C3  
 The Percent of Cartoons in Magazines Coded as in Each  
 Humor Category by Five Year Intervals

Year	Magazine Category								
	Women's			Men's			General		
	Conflict	Social Control	Social Disregard	Conflict	Social Control	Social Disregard	Conflict	Social Control	Social Disregard
1950	17	26	29	4	18	50	9	28	35
1955	32	20	20	2	28	42	4	18	50
1960	2	24	46	5	33	34	11	28	33
1965	8	36	28	9	7	56	8	20	44
1970	9	19	44	3	23	46	6	19	47
1975	11	8	53	7	37	28	2	10	60

TABLE C4

The Percent of Cartoons in Magazines Coded as in the Conflict and Social Control Humor Subcategories by Five Year Intervals

Magazine Category	Humor Categories				
	Conflict			Social Control	
	Fighting Back	Liberated Views	Traditional Use	Women Stereotyped	Ridicule of "Libbers"
GENERAL					
1950	4	2	2	24	--
1955	--	--	4	18	--
1960	2	--	8	26	2
1965	2	2	4	20	--
1970	2	2	2	16	2
1975	--	2	--	6	2
MEN'S					
1950	2	--	2	8	10
1955	--	--	2	28	--
1960	4	--	--	30	2
1965	2	6	--	6	--
1970	--	--	--	18	2
1975	2	--	4	22	14
WOMEN'S					
1950	4	--	12	22	4
1955	6	2	20	16	4
1960	--	--	--	20	4
1965	4	2	2	36	--
1970	2	4	--	14	4
1975	6	2	2	6	2

APPENDIX D

APPENDIX D

TABLES WITHOUT DISAGREES

TABLE D1

The Percent of Cartoons Coded in Each Humor Category and the Divorce Rate by Five Year Intervals--Without Disagrees

Year	Humor Category and Divorce Rate			
	Percent of Conflict Humor	Percent of Social Control Humor	Percent of Social Disregard Humor	Divorce Rate
1950	11.5	34.6	53.9	2.6
1955	17.8	29.8	52.4	2.3
1960	5.7	41.4	52.9	2.2
1965	11.3	29.2	59.4	2.5
1970	6.5	28.0	65.5	3.5
1975	8.6	24.8	66.7	4.9

TABLE D2

Pearson's R's for the Percent of Cartoons Coded in Each Humor Category and the Divorce Rate--Without Disagrees

	Humor Category		
	Conflict	Social Control	Social Disregard
r	-.69	-.40	+.59

TABLE D3

The Percent of Cartoons in Magazines Coded  
as in Each Humor Category--Without Disagrees

Humor Category	Magazine Category		
	General	Women's	Men's
Conflict	9.6	16.4	4.8
Social Control	28.1	31.9	34.0
Social Disregard	62.3	51.7	61.2

TABLE D4

The Percent of Cartoons Coded in the Conflict and Social  
Control Humor Subcategories--Without Disagrees

Percentages	Humor Category				
	Conflict			Social Control	
	Fighting Back	Liberated Views	Traditional Use	Women Stereotyped	Ridicule of "Libbers"
Frequency of cartoons by subcategory	42	24	64	336	52
Percent of subcategory	.33	.18	.49	.87	.13
Percent of total	.03	.02	.05	.27	.04



TABLE D5

The Percent of Cartoons coded in the Conflict and Social Control  
Humor Subcategories by Five Year Intervals--Without Disagrees

Year	Humor Category				
	Conflict			Social Control	
	Fighting Back	Traditional Use	Liberated Views	Women Stereotyped	Ridicule of "Libbers"
1950	3.8	--	7.7	27.9	6.7
1955	5.3	1.0	11.5	27.9	1.9
1960	1.9	--	3.8	38.0	3.4
1965	3.8	4.2	3.3	29.2	--
1970	2.5	3.0	1.0	24.0	4.0
1975	3.8	1.9	2.9	16.2	8.6

TABLE D6  
 The Percent of Cartoons in Magazines Coded as in Each  
 Humor Category By Five Year Intervals--Without Disagrees

Year	Magazine Category								
	General			Men's			Women's		
	Conflict	Social Control	Social Disregard	Conflict	Social Control	Social Disregard	Conflict	Social Control	Social Disregard
1950	8	24	34	4	18	50	16	26	28
1955	4	18	50	2	28	42	28	20	18
1960	10	28	30	4	32	34	--	24	46
1965	8	20	44	8	6	54	8	36	28
1970	6	18	46	--	20	44	6	18	40
1975	2	8	60	6	36	28	10	8	52

TABLE D7

The Percent of Cartoons in Magazines Coded as in  
The Conflict and Social Control Humor Subcategories  
By Five Year Intervals--Without Disagrees

Magazine Category	Humor Category				
	Conflict			Social Control	
	Fighting Back	Liberated Views	Traditional Use	Women Stereotyped	Ridicule of "Libbers"
Women's					
1950	4	-	12	22	4
1955	6	2	20	16	4
1960	-	-	-	20	4
1965	4	2	2	36	-
1970	2	4	-	14	4
1975	6	2	2	6	2
Men's					
1950	2	-	2	8	10
1955	-	-	2	28	-
1960	4	-	-	30	2
1965	2	6	-	6	-
1970	-	-	-	18	2
1975	2	-	4	22	14
General					
1950	4	2	2	24	-
1955	-	-	4	18	-
1960	2	-	8	26	2
1965	2	2	4	20	-
1970	2	2	2	16	2
1975	-	2	-	6	2

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