Telling Jokes That Disparage Social Groups: Effects on the Joke Teller's Stereotypes

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An experiment tested whether or not reciting disparaging humor about a disadvantaged group affects joke tellers' stereotypes of the group. In this experiment, we manipulated whether participants recited humor that disparaged Newfoundlanders, who are a relatively disadvantaged group in Canada, or nondisparaging humor. We then asked participants to complete a measure of their stereotypes and attitudes toward Newfoundlanders. Results indicated that participants who recited disparaging humor subsequently reported more negative stereotypes of Newfoundlanders than did participants who recited nondisparaging humor. Attitudes toward Newfoundlanders were not affected by the manipulation. Practical and theoretical implications of these findings are discussed.

In comedy clubs, joke books, television comedy, and social events, people are often exposed to humor that disparages others. In such humor, the target of the joke is victimized, belittled, or suffers some misfortune or act of aggression (Zillmann, 1983). Sometimes, the target of the disparaging humor is a particular individual (e.g., Dan Quayle). Other times, the target of the disparaging humor is a particular social group (e.g., a minority group).

Researchers have proposed many explanations for the enjoyment of disparaging humor. Freud (1905/1960) argued that people find disparaging humor to

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be amusing because it allows the expression of aggressive and hostile feelings in a socially acceptable manner. This idea is compatible with Zillmann and Cantor’s (1976) dispositional theory of disparagement humor, which proposes that people enjoy a disparaging joke more when they have negative attitudes toward the victimized party, positive attitudes toward the agent of disparagement, or both. Several studies have supported this model (e.g., Cantor & Zillmann, 1973; LaFave, Haddad, & Marshall, 1974; Wicker, Baron, & Willis, 1980; cf. Wyer & Collins, 1992). Thus, disparagement humor appears to be enjoyed partly because it permits the socially acceptable expression of negative sentiments toward a target.

In the present research, rather than looking at the reasons why people enjoy disparaging humor, we investigated the effects of such humor. In particular, we examined the effects of such humor on stereotypes of the disparaged group. Many people assume that the use of such humor perpetuates negative stereotypes and attitudes toward the disparaged groups, as indicated by the furor generated by comedians who use disparaging humor (e.g., Andrew “Dice” Clay). Given this controversy, it is important to empirically examine the effects of disparaging humor on stereotypes.

Effects of Exposure to Disparagement Humor

The impact of disparagement humor on stereotypes is a broad issue that encompasses several specific questions, including the effects of being exposed to disparagement humor from others and the effects of communicating disparagement humor to others. We have examined the effects of exposure to disparaging humor on stereotypes and attitudes in previous research (Olson, Maio, & Hobden, in press). In our past research, we assumed that exposure to disparaging humor might cause stereotypes of the disparaged group to become more negative through several psychological mechanisms. For example, simple exposure to an assertion increases its judged validity (Gilbert, Krull, & Malone, 1990), perhaps because familiar ideas are assumed to have some truth value. Also, current models of persuasion (e.g., Chaiken, 1987; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) predict that exposure to a message is more likely to cause attitude change when people do not counterargue the message. Because disparaging jokes are told in a humorous context, people might less readily counterargue the negative stereotypes implied by the jokes than if they were conveyed in a more serious fashion.

We conducted three experiments to examine the effects of exposure to disparaging humor (Olson et al., in press). In all three experiments, some participants read humor that disparaged a particular group, whereas others read humor that did not disparage the group. In two of the experiments, additional
conditions were included: Some participants read disparaging *statements* about the group, whereas others did not read anything at all (i.e., neither humor nor statements). In two of the experiments, men were the targets of the disparagement humor; in the other experiment, lawyers were the targets.

Stereotypes were then assessed by asking participants to rate the extent to which various characteristics were descriptive of the target group. It was expected that participants who read disparaging humor would rate stereotypic characteristics as more descriptive of the target group than would participants who read nondisparaging humor.

Despite the variety of manipulations employed, we obtained no evidence to support the hypothesis that simple exposure to disparaging jokes causes people to adopt negative stereotypes. Across the three experiments, a total of 41 analyses yielded only one significant difference, which was in the opposite of the predicted direction. Also, a meta-analysis revealed nonsignificant effect sizes.

**Effects of Reciting Disparagement Humor**

Rather than testing for an effect of exposure to disparagement humor on stereotypes, the present research tests whether *reciting* disparaging humor negatively changes the joke teller's stereotypes. Such effects of reciting disparagement humor would be interesting, at least in part, because joke tellers often express disclaimers, such as “It is only a joke” or “I am just kidding,” after their joke. Apparently, joke tellers often believe that their jokes should not be taken seriously by anyone, which would make it paradoxical to discover that the joke tellers themselves may be affected by their jokes.

Furthermore, although simple exposure to disparagement humor might not affect stereotypes, it is possible that recitation of disparagement humor might have a more powerful influence. For example, reciting disparagement humor might more strongly affect stereotypes because telling a joke requires more extensive processing of the humor. That is, instead of simply reading or listening to a joke once, people who tell the joke must (a) think about the joke (i.e., review it mentally), and then (b) tell it. To the extent that telling a disparaging joke causes repeated processing of it, telling the joke might have stronger effects on the stereotypes implied by the joke.

In addition, reciting disparagement humor might cause stereotypes to become more negative through self-persuasion mechanisms. For example, through a self-perception process (Bem, 1972; Olson, 1990, 1992), the joke teller might assume that he or she believes the stereotypes implied by the joke. Alternatively, through cognitive dissonance processes (Festinger, 1957), the joke teller might persuade himself or herself about the validity of the stereotypes. In a sense, telling disparaging jokes might elicit some degree of commitment (Kiesler, 1971)
to the disparaging sentiments. Thus, telling a disparaging joke might affect stereotypes of the disparaged group through several processes.

Is there any evidence suggesting that reciting disparaging humor can negatively affect the joke teller's stereotypes? The only relevant research has examined the effect of reciting disparaging humor on the joke teller's attitudes toward the group. Specifically, Hobden and Olson (1994) manipulated whether participants freely recited disparaging jokes that played upon the stereotype that lawyers are greedy. Participants' attitudes toward lawyers were then measured. Results indicated that freely reciting the disparaging humor about lawyers caused participants to subsequently indicate more negative attitudes toward lawyers.

One possible explanation for Hobden and Olson's (1994) findings is that reciting the disparaging jokes made participants' negative stereotypes of lawyers more accessible from memory. For example, reciting the jokes might have caused participants to be more aware of their belief that lawyers are greedy. The salience of this stereotype might then have led to the formation of negative attitudes that were consistent with the salient stereotype. Nevertheless, another interesting possibility is that reciting the disparaging humor actually changed participants' stereotypes. That is, the jokes might have caused participants' stereotypes of lawyers to become more negative which, in turn, caused the formation of more negative attitudes. Indeed, it has been noted that measures of attitudes can potentially reflect negative stereotypes (Eagly, Mladinic, & Otto, 1994; Esses, Haddock, & Zanna, 1993; Maio, Esses, & Bell, 1994). Thus, the negative effect on attitudes might have reflected a negative change in the stereotypes themselves.

If reciting disparaging humor does negatively alter people's stereotypes, this would be an important finding because stereotypes influence how people encode, interpret, and recall information about individual group members (Hamilton & Trolier, 1986; Stangor & Lange, 1994). Stereotypes might even affect the way that members of a stereotyped group behave toward others (Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974). Unfortunately, Hobden and Olson's (1994) experiment did not contain measures that could test whether reciting the disparaging humor affected participants' stereotypes. The principal purpose of the present research was to test whether reciting disparaging humor can affect joke tellers' stereotypes of the targeted group.

In addition, unlike past research (Hobden & Olson, 1994; Olson et al., in press), we examined the effect of reciting disparaging humor on joke tellers' stereotypes of a relatively disadvantaged target group. Past research has examined the effects of jokes about men and lawyers because jokes about these two groups are unlikely to elicit negative reactions from research participants and are easy to obtain (Hobden & Olson, 1994; Olson et al., in press). However, these two
groups enjoy relatively advantaged status in society, and disparaging humor might have more pernicious effects on disadvantaged groups: Disadvantaged groups are worse off to begin with, without having to bear the effects of disparaging humor.

The chosen target group was residents of Newfoundland, Canada. Residents of this province are poorer than are residents of other provinces within Canada and score less well on literacy tests (Canada Year Book, 1992; see also Makin, 1994a, 1994b). Thus, within Canada, residents of this province are often the target of “Newfie” jokes, which portray Newfoundlanders as likable dullards.³

We manipulated whether participants read disparaging jokes about Newfoundlanders or nondisparaging jokes.⁴ Stereotypes of Newfoundlanders were then assessed by asking participants to rate Newfoundlanders on a series of stereotype-relevant and stereotype-irrelevant traits. Disparaging humor was expected to produce more extreme, negative ratings of Newfoundlanders on the stereotype-relevant traits than was nondisparaging humor.

After completing the measure of stereotypes, participants also indicated their attitudes toward Newfoundlanders. We expected that the results for this measure would replicate Hobden and Olson’s (1994) finding that reciting disparaging humor elicits negative attitudes toward the disparaged group. Thus, disparaging humor was expected to produce more negative attitudes toward Newfoundlanders than was nondisparaging humor.

Method

Participants

Participants were 95 undergraduates (71 female and 24 male) at the University of Western Ontario, who participated for course credit. Four additional

³For non-Canadian readers, it might be helpful to know that Canadians’ stereotype of Newfoundlanders is similar to the “country bumpkin” stereotype, which also refers to slow, likable people. Also, in Canada, many well-known musicians and entertainers are Newfoundlanders, which contributes to their likability as a group.

⁴Unlike previous experiments (Olson et al., in press), we did not include a condition where participants simply read disparaging statements. This condition was omitted for two reasons. First, given our previous difficulties obtaining effects of disparaging humor (Olson et al., in press), we wanted to maximize the power of our experiment for detecting effects of disparaging humor; thus, we wanted to put as many participants as possible in the disparagement and nondisparagement humor conditions. Also, at the least, this design enables us to show that disparaging statements have negative effects, even when they are told in a humorous fashion, thereby dispelling commonplace notions that the humorous aspect of disparaging humor causes people to treat disparaging jokes simply as jokes, without being affected on a deeper level.
participants were deleted from the analyses because they were suspicious, and seven additional participants chose not to complete the experimental manipulation.

Procedure

Each participant was tested individually by a female experimenter. Participants were told that they would be participating in three separate "studies." The "first study" contained the experimental manipulation, during which participants recited jokes into a tape recorder. Participants were randomly assigned to recite either jokes that disparaged Newfoundlanders or nondisparaging jokes. The "second study" contained a measure of the extent to which reciting disparaging humor primed participants' stereotypes of Newfoundlanders (i.e., activated them from memory). Unfortunately, our data from this measure indicated that it did not display the basic characteristics of a priming measure. Consequently, this measure is not discussed further in the text. The "third study" contained the measures of participants' stereotypes and attitudes toward Newfoundlanders. After completing the three "studies," participants were probed for suspicion, debriefed, and given a feedback letter.

Experimental Manipulation

To provide a cover story for the experimental manipulation, the experimenter said that she was trying to discover voice qualities that make people sound funny or unfunny when they tell jokes. She explained that, to determine which voice qualities make jokes sound funny, participants were being asked to read a comedy routine into a tape recorder in whatever way they feel most comfortable. Participants were then told that the recording would be played to a small group of future participants, who would rate the funniness of the comedy routine, and that the recordings would be analyzed to determine which voice qualities made the routines sound funny.

In the priming measure, participants drew from a cup the number of a "social worker report," which we created. This "report" contained a description of the behavior of "John Doe," who was subtly described as a former resident of Newfoundland. The report was intended to describe behaviors that were ambiguous with respect to John Doe's intelligence (e.g., he often did not understand the social worker). Unfortunately, however, analyses of participants' ratings of John Doe revealed that he was rated as being distinctly unintelligent, regardless of whether participants read disparaging or nondisparaging humor. These ratings indicated that the report did not describe John Doe ambiguously, which is a necessary feature of a priming measure (e.g., Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977; Srull & Wyer, 1979). Also, the low ratings in the nondisparaging humor condition may have caused a floor effect. (In other words, the ratings in the disparaging humor condition could not get much lower than the ratings in the nondisparaging humor condition.)
After giving these instructions, the experimenter gave participants either the disparaging or nondisparaging humor to read silently, before reciting it aloud.

Disparaging humor. The disparaging humor belittled the intelligence of Newfoundlanders. A portion of the disparaging humor is presented below.

Fortunately, after a long period of illiteracy, Newfoundlanders are finally trying to get their B.A.s. They’ve finally mastered the first two letters of the alphabet—and backwards at that.

Statistics really confuse Newfoundlanders. One Newfie friend of mine heard that every minute a woman gives birth to a baby. He thinks she should be stopped.

Nondisparaging humor. The nondisparaging humor featured a number of humorous anecdotes from a popular joke book (Seinfeld, 1994). A portion of the nondisparaging humor is presented below.

I used to love getting ice cream from the ice cream man. I remember the menu of different ice creams was right by the exhaust pipe. The motor was running. My parents would go berserk if they ever caught me smoking a cigarette, but they’d let me stand there and breathe exhaust fumes for 20 min.

Only a 7-year-old kid can actually taste the difference between different colors of M & Ms. For example, I thought the red was heartier, more of a main course M & M. And the light brown was a mellower, kind of after-dinner M & M.

Participants then rated the funniness of the comedy routine that they had read (see Joke Ratings section) and were given assurances about the videotaping (e.g., the experimenter could edit out any mistakes). Next, prior to actually reciting the routine, participants were reminded about their freedom to decline to read the routine. Seven participants declined to read the routine into the tape recorder, always stating that they could not speak English very well. Participants took approximately 10 to 15 min to read, rate, and recite the comedy routines.

Joke Ratings

Before reading either the disparaging or nondisparaging comedy routine into the tape recorder, participants were asked to rate the funniness of the
routine on a 9-point scale that ranged from 0 (not at all funny) to 8 (extremely funny).

**Stereotypes of the Disparaged Group**

The experimenter told participants that she was interested in studying the perceptions that people have of Canadians who live in different parts of the country. Participants were told that, to determine how Canadians in various regions perceive each other, the data from the study were going to be combined with data from studies being conducted in other provinces. They were also told that, because of time constraints, it would not be possible to ask each participant about every province. Consequently, each participant was asked to randomly draw a province from a cup. (All slips in the cup were labeled "Newfoundland."

Prior to selecting a province, participants completed an information sheet asking them to indicate their gender, province of birth, and province of residence. This information form served two purposes. First, it further bolstered the cover story for the measure. Second, it enabled the researchers to identify any participants who were natives of Newfoundland so that they could be dropped from the analyses (none of the participants were from Newfoundland).

After selecting Newfoundland, the experimenter scanned 10 different piles of booklets on shelves in plain view of the participant. Each pile was clearly labeled with the name of a province. The experimenter selected the booklet from the pile labeled "Newfoundland." Using the booklet, participants were asked to indicate how they perceived the average resident of Newfoundland, without being concerned whether their ratings were too positive or too negative. Participants were also told not to worry if they did not know anyone from the province, as their perceptions may come from a variety of sources, such as family, friends, or the media.

Participants rated Newfoundlanders on 16 different traits. Four of the traits reflected high intelligence (wise, clever, intelligent, ingenious), whereas four of the traits reflected low intelligence (inept, foolish, dim-witted, slow). In addition, four of the traits were positive and stereotype irrelevant (level-headed, stable, calm, open-minded), and four of the traits were negative and stereotype irrelevant (moody, unstable, temperamental, stubborn). Participants rated the extent to which the traits accurately described Newfoundlanders, using a 9-point scale that ranged from 0 (not at all) to 8 (extremely). For both the stereotype-relevant and stereotype-irrelevant dimensions, an index of evaluation across the positively and negatively valenced traits was calculated. For each dimension, the sum of the ratings for the negative items was reverse-scored and added to
the sum of the ratings for the positive items (both \( \alpha_s > .71 \)). High scores on both indexes indicated more positive attributions than did low scores.\(^6\)

**Attitudes Toward the Disparaged Group**

After completing the direct stereotype measure, participants rated their attitudes toward Newfoundlanders on five 7-point scales that ranged from -3 to +3. These scales were anchored by bad/good, dislikable/likable, negative/positive, harmful/beneficial, and worthless/valuable. To form an index of participants' attitudes toward people from Newfoundland, participants' responses to the five scales were averaged. The index possessed good reliability (\( \alpha = .77 \)).\(^7\)

**Results**

For all of the dependent measures, preliminary analyses indicated no significant effects or interactions involving gender of participant. Consequently, gender of participant is not included as a factor in any of the reported analyses.

**Humor Manipulation Check**

A \( t \) test was conducted to determine whether the disparaging jokes and non-disparaging jokes were differentially funny. As hoped, there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of the disparaging and nondisparaging jokes, \( t(93) = 0.18, \) ns. Collapsed across conditions, participants' mean funniness rating was 3.82, which indicates that, on average, the jokes were rated as approximately "moderately funny" (4 on the scale from 0 to 8).

**Stereotypes of the Disparaged Group**

Participants' ratings of Newfoundlanders were submitted to a \( 2 \times 2 \) (Disparagement \( \times \) Relevance) mixed-model ANOVA, with stereotype relevance as a within-subjects factor. Results indicated an effect of stereotype relevance, \( F(1, 89) = 12.30, p < .002 \), such that Newfoundlanders were rated more

\(^6\)Ten additional people were asked to rate the relevance of these traits to the stereotype of Newfoundlanders, using a scale from 0 (not at all relevant) to 8 (extremely relevant). As expected, participants rated the stereotype-relevant traits as more relevant (\( M = 6.85 \)) than the stereotype-irrelevant traits (\( M = 1.71 \)), \( t(9) = 15.91, p < .001 \).

\(^7\)We expected moderately positive correlations between participants’ responses to the measures of stereotype-relevant perceptions, stereotype-irrelevant perceptions, and attitudes because these three measures focus on related, yet distinct perceptions. In fact, the correlations between these three measures were moderately positive, \( .31 < r_{s(89)} < .44, ps < .001 \).
Table 1

Stereotypes of the Disparaged Group: Trait Ratings as a Function of Disparagement and Trait Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait category</th>
<th>Nondisparagement (N = 46)</th>
<th>Disparagement (N = 45)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stereotype relevant</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotype irrelevant</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>4.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Stereotype relevant = intelligent vs. unintelligent traits; stereotype irrelevant = unemotional vs. emotional traits. Higher scores indicate more positive perceptions.

negatively on the stereotype-relevant traits ($M = 3.97$) than on the stereotype-irrelevant traits ($M = 4.45$). In addition, there was an effect of disparagement humor, $F(1, 89) = 7.19, p < .01$, such that participants who recited the disparaging humor rated Newfoundlanders more negatively ($M = 3.92$) than did participants who recited the nondisparaging humor ($M = 4.49$). These main effects were qualified by a Disparagement x Relevance interaction, $F(1, 89) = 3.87, p = .05$ (Table 1). Examination of this interaction revealed that the effect of disparagement was significant for the stereotype-relevant traits (e.g., intelligent), $t(89) = 3.32, p < .01$, but not for the stereotype-irrelevant traits (e.g., calm), $t(89) = 1.21, ns.\textsuperscript{8}$

Attitudes Toward the Disparaged Group

A $t$ test was conducted on participants' responses to the attitude measure, with disparagement humor condition as the sole factor. Results indicated that participants who recited disparagement humor did not subsequently express more negative attitudes toward Newfoundlanders ($M = 1.05$) than did participants who recited the nondisparagement humor ($M = 1.25$), $t(91) = 1.23, ns.$

\textsuperscript{8}We replicated this analysis, but this time we included valence of the traits (positive vs. negative) as a factor. Thus, this analysis examined the effect of the disparagement humor manipulation on participants' responses to the (a) positive, stereotype-relevant traits; (b) negative, stereotype-relevant traits; (c) positive, stereotype-irrelevant traits; and (d) negative, stereotype-irrelevant traits. Results replicated the effects of disparagement humor that were reported in text, and these findings were not qualified by the valence of the traits.
Discussion

As expected, the results indicated that telling disparagement humor can affect stereotypes. That is, participants who were asked to recite the disparaging humor rated Newfoundlanders more negatively on stereotype-relevant traits than did participants who were asked to recite nondisparaging humor. Importantly, participants who recited disparagement humor did not rate Newfoundlanders more negatively on stereotype-irrelevant traits; nor did reciting disparaging humor negatively affect participants' attitudes. Thus, reciting the disparaging jokes did not make overall evaluations of Newfoundlanders more negative; rather, the effect was specific to stereotype-relevant dimensions.

Although this evidence is consistent with our hypothesis that reciting disparaging humor causes joke tellers to develop more negative stereotypes of the disparaged group, these results did not replicate Hobden and Olson's (1994) finding that freely reciting disparaging humor caused the formation of negative attitudes. Two factors might explain this disparity. First, Hobden and Olson presented disparaging jokes about lawyers, whose stereotypical traits are "greedy" and "arrogant." Thinking about these traits might elicit negative attitudes toward lawyers. In contrast, we presented disparaging jokes about Newfoundlanders, to whom the stereotype "inept, but affable" seems most applicable (see Footnote 3). People might believe that a greedy person is morally reproachable, but an unintelligent person might even elicit compassion. Consequently, reciting the disparaging humor about Newfoundlanders might reinforce the stereotype that they are unintelligent, but not reinforce dislike or negative attitudes toward them.

Second, Hobden and Olson (1994) suggested that they found negative effects on attitudes partly because a negative consequence of reciting disparaging humor was made salient to the participants in their experiment. Specifically, their participants were told that the tapes of them reciting the disparaging humor would be played to high-school students and that the high-school students might become more prejudiced after hearing the tapes. This aversive consequence was presumed to have elicited cognitive dissonance (Cooper & Fazio, 1984), which in turn motivated participants to change their attitudes in order to justify their behavior. In our experiments, no aversive consequences were made salient, which reduced the likelihood that dissonance was aroused. Perhaps reciting disparaging humor must arouse dissonance in order for there to be an effect on attitudes.

Regardless of the reasons for the null effect on attitudes, our findings indicate that reciting disparaging humor can reinforce negative stereotypes of groups. This finding raises some important concerns about the effects of disparagement humor. Currently, disparagement humor is controversial because
there is widespread belief that the use of disparagement humor contributes to the formation of negative stereotypes. Our research suggests that reciting disparagement humor (though perhaps not simple exposure to such humor) can indeed have this effect.

Before further discussing implications of this conclusion, however, it is important to discount an alternative explanation for the effect of reciting disparagement humor in this experiment. Specifically, it could be suggested that participants who recited the disparagement humor felt an experimental demand to evaluate Newfoundlanders negatively. There are several reasons why we doubt the validity of this explanation. First, we included elaborate contrivances to make the measurement of stereotypes of Newfoundlanders appear coincidental (see Method). Second, we used a relatively naïve sample of participants, who were introductory psychology students in their first 4 months of study. Third, postexperimental probes revealed virtually no suspicion about connections between the jokes and the evaluations (or anything else). Fourth, if demand did play a role in this experiment, participants should have indicated more negative attitudes toward Newfoundlanders in the disparagement humor condition than in the nondisparagement humor condition, but no effect on attitudes was observed. Finally, our previous research on the effects of exposure to (rather than recitation of) disparagement humor has used similar methods (see Olson et al., in press), but yielded no significant effects. If experimental demands were strong or obvious, we should have obtained effects of disparagement humor in these previous experiments. In sum, the demand explanation seems unlikely as an account of our own data.

A related, but more plausible, explanation is that participants who recited disparaging humor felt that it was more acceptable to express their negative stereotypes of Newfoundlanders than did participants who recited nondisparaging humor. If so, the effect of disparagement humor would remain important because the willingness to suppress stereotypes is an important variable in predicting the effects of stereotypes on attitudes and behavior (e.g., Devine, 1989; Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, & Jetten, 1994). Future research should explore this possibility.

Also, future research is needed to discover factors that might moderate the effect of reciting disparagement humor on stereotypes. Perhaps, for example, distancing oneself from a joke prior to telling the joke can prevent an effect of disparaging humor on stereotypes. Joke tellers sometimes warn listeners when a joke is offensive (e.g., “This joke is rude, but it is funny, so here goes . . .”). Past research has shown that such distancing behaviors can reduce the impact of a person’s verbal statements on his or her own attitudes (Fleming & Rudman, 1993). Thus, it is possible that such disclaimers also reduce the impact of one’s jokes on one’s own stereotypes.
In addition, future research should test whether the effect of reciting disparaging humor on stereotypes is moderated by individual difference variables. For example, people who are high in right-wing authoritarianism tend to accept aggression against disadvantaged minorities (Altemeyer, 1988). Consequently, people who are high on this trait might be more likely to enjoy humor that disparages such groups and more likely to embrace the stereotypes that they learn through disparaging humor.

Regardless of whether future research obtains such findings, it cannot be assumed that people are immune to the effects of the jokes that they recite. Despite being said in jest, jokes can affect the beliefs of the people who tell them. It appears that people may take their own jokes more seriously than they realize.

References


