WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE FUNNY?
THE SPONTANEOUS HUMOR PRODUCER'S SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of the individual who spontaneously produces humor during conversation. Although a broad humor literature exists, very little research addresses the experience of the spontaneous humor producer. This study represents an early step toward filling this gap in the literature. I gathered data by videotaping organizational meetings and conducting subsequent Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) interviews with individuals who produced humor during the course of the meetings. I analyzed data from the IPR interviews using an emergent thematic analysis. Most humor producers in this sample were consciously aware of specific external cues, thoughts, and feelings when they produced humor. Sometimes, participants were aware of what they hoped to accomplish by interjecting humor and, at other times, they recalled their intentions only upon reflection. Producers' tacit assumptions, or underlying beliefs about humor and/or about themselves, as well as certain aspects of the context affected their humor production as well. The study also uncovered three themes about the experience of humor production. First, humor producers were fully engaged in the dynamics of the current interaction when they contributed humor. Second, many humor producers reported having a sense of other group members' internal experiences. Third, participants' roles within the group often led to different experiences of humor production. Leaders tended to initiate humor in hopes of influencing others and/or creating change. Team members who did not hold formal

positions of leadership were especially tuned into their managers' actions, thoughts, and feelings. This study adds meaningfully to the humor literature, especially to research on humor functions, tacit knowledge, humor and social sensitivity, and humor and hierarchical relationships. The results of this study also have important implications for leadership. In addition, I propose a connection between this study's findings and research on improvisation. The electronic version of this dissertation is at OhioLink ETD Center, http://etd.ohiolink.edu/.

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Chapter I: Introduction

In Chapter 1, I explain the importance of humor research, define humor, discuss the purpose of this study, and introduce research on tacit knowledge. I also describe my epistemological stance and provide an overview of the dissertation.

Importance of Humor Research

Humor is ubiquitous. According to Mulkay (1988), "humor is one of the few basic social phenomena which occur in all groups throughout the course of human history" (p. 1). Martin (2007) described it as "a universal human activity that most people experience many times over the course of a typical day and in all sorts of social contexts" (p. 29). Wyer and Collins (1992) wrote:

> It is a rare conversation in which at least one participant does not respond with amusement to something another has said or done. Jokes, witticisms, and other humorous verbal and nonverbal behaviors are commonplace in social interaction situations and can have a major impact on the quality of the interactions. (p. 663)

Humor emerged in a wide range of anthropological studies as a central mode of communication; for example, calypso humor in Trinidad (Jones & Liverpool, 1976), teasing in Balinese cockfighting (Geertz, 1973), and joking relationships in preliterate societies (Apte, 1985).

Humor is also associated with desirable outcomes. For example, on a physical level humor reduces pain (Cogan, Cogan, Waltz, & McCue, 1987), lowers blood pressure (Martin, Kuiper, Olinger, & Dance, 1993), boosts the autoimmune system (Berk et al., 1989), and relieves tension and stress (Martin &

Lefcourt, 1983). Socially, some of humor's positive functions include facilitating the introduction of difficult topics (Fine, 1984), strengthening individual connections (Cooper, 2008), expressing criticism in a non-threatening way (Robert & Yan, 2007), ingratiating oneself to others (Cooper, 2005), minimizing power differentials (Duncan, 1984), and increasing trust (Lynch, 2002).

Humor research is important because the phenomenon is pervasive *and* significantly affects individuals, groups, and social systems. However, academia has been slow to recognize the value of studying humor. A paradox exists in the field of humor studies. Humor scholars decry the lack of support for (and sometimes even prejudice against) their area of interest (Raskin, 2008). At the same time, many dedicated researchers have persisted in their studies of humor despite institutional resistance. A wealth of knowledge about humor exists--mostly tucked away in separate disciplinary silos. Interdisciplinary humor research like the current study is especially valuable because it bridges perspectives that have yet to be fully integrated.

Definition of Humor

The definition of humor varies greatly within the literature as well as across cultures and social situations. A comment or behavior considered humorous in one context may be interpreted quite differently in another. Cooper (2008) suggested, "the expansiveness of this construct [humor] requires that researchers place bounds on the specific aspect of humor that is their object of interest" (p. 1089). Responding to this advice, I adopt the following definition:

Humor is a spontaneous and intentional verbal or nonverbal instance of communication that any of the interacting parties perceives as amusing.

Several elements of the definition make it appropriate for the current study. It refers to *spontaneous* humor, not prepared or canned jokes; focuses on *intentional* humor, not *accidental* humor; recognizes that humor producers act with intention but avoids making assumptions about their *specific* intentions; includes both verbal and nonverbal modes of communication; and classifies a communication as humorous if the producer *or* any target finds it amusing. In Chapter 2, I will explore each element of this definition.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of individuals who spontaneously produce humor during conversation. The topic of humor production has received little attention in the research literature. Other scholars have also noted this gap. Mulkay (1988) criticized studies of humor because participants are almost always passive recipients rather than active initiators of humor. Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (1995) regretted that "prior studies did not address a source-orientation to humorous communication" (p. 143). Siegler (2003) found that most research on humor and cognition has examined the cognitive processes involved in *understanding* humor, rather than how humor is *produced*.

Humor scholars have also called for additional research examining *spontaneous* humor (as opposed to canned joking) (Craik & Ware, 1998). Martin

(2007) wrote, "much of the past theoretical and empirical work focused on jokes as a prototype of humor; however, jokes are a relatively insignificant source of humor in most people's daily lives" (p. 110). The majority of humor occurs spontaneously in the course of interactions. Bergson (as cited in Goodchilds, 1972) insisted that "to understand laughter, we must put it back into its natural environment" (p. 173) of conversation. Babad (1974) criticized studies of humor for attempting to measure this variable in experimental settings: "to obtain a valid measure of humor, we must penetrate the social context and measure directly how the person behaves in his daily interactions with others" (p. 619). Long and Graesser (1988) suggested that researchers have avoided the topic of spontaneous humor because it is so difficult to study: "the spontaneous nature of wit has made it difficult to study; it is therefore not surprising that psychologists have most often studied jokes" (p. 38).

Research Question and Introduction of Relevant Literature

My research represents a first step toward responding to these scholars' recommendations by focusing on spontaneous humor production. My research question is as follows: What is the subjective experience of the spontaneous humor producer? This study fills a gap in the humor literature and sheds light on a ubiquitous mode of communication associated with important outcomes. As this dissertation study is situated with a program of Leadership and Change, exploring the implications of humor research for the study of leadership is also valuable.

A growing body of research connects humor directly to effective leadership (Avolio, Howell, & Sosik, 1999; Cooper, 2002; Malone, 1980). More general research on the functions and effects of humor indicates that it *indirectly* leads to responses that many leaders hope to inspire within their social systems. This general research links humor and influence (Barsoux, 1996; Davis & Kleiner, 1989; Holmes & Marra, 2006), humor and positive relationships (Barsoux, 1996; Bolinger, 2001; Philbrick, 1989), and/or humor and group cohesion (Duncan & Feisal, 1989; Graham, Papa, & Brooks, 1992; Terrion & Ashforth, 2002).

The current study took place in the context of organizational meetings. Schwartzman (1989) defined a meeting as "a communicative event that organizes interaction in distinctive ways. Most specifically a meeting is a gathering of three or more people who agree to assemble for a purpose ostensibly related to the functioning of an organization or group" (p. 61). Meetings often involve groups trying to solve problems and to make decisions, and *leadership* is likely to emerge during such interactions. *Humor* is also likely to arise during meetings (Bailey, 1983; Schwartzman, 1989). Thus, meetings provide a good opportunity for witnessing both behaviors. The meeting context has already provided a rich source of data for several humor researchers (Coser, 1960; Hatch, 1997; Hatch & Erlich, 1993; Holmes & Marra, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c).

Organization members spend a large proportion of their time in meetings. Rogelberg, Scott, & Kello (2007) found that "conservatively, the average employee spends approximately six hours per week in scheduled meetings, with

supervisors spending more time than non-supervisors . . . Senior managers attend nearly 23 hours of meetings every week" (p. 18). The prevalence of meetings in organizational life and likelihood that humor will emerge during meetings made organizational meetings a logical context for this study.

Humor is not always associated with attractive outcomes. For example, humor may be deployed to disparage others (Zillman & Cantor, 1976; Zillman & Stocking, 1976), to control others' behaviors (Holmes, 2000; Martineau, 1972), and to marginalize specific people or groups of people (Davies, 1982; Davies, 1988; Duncan, Smeltzer & Leap, 1990). Because this study focuses on humor that leads to amusement, it did not capture humor that evoked negative responses. This focus prevents me from examining differences that may exist between the processes of creating humor that lead to positive versus negative effects. However, delimiting the current study in this manner made sense in light of the paucity of research on all types of humor production. I delve deeply into the experience of humor producers whose interjections led to positive responses. This research provides a model for future research that includes an investigation of negative humor.

Tacit Knowledge

Tacit knowledge research provides theoretical grounding for this study. Sternberg et al. (2000) defined tacit knowledge as:

> the procedural knowledge one learns in everyday life that usually is not taught and often is not even verbalized. Tacit knowledge includes . . . knowing what to say to whom, knowing when to say it, and knowing how to say it for maximum effect. (p. xi)

Although research has yet to directly connect humor production with the concept of tacit knowledge, studies about humor production and humor development imply a connection (Dewitte & Verguts, 2001; Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003; Nevo & Nevo, 1983). An individual's ability to effectively use and interpret humor is likely to depend at least partially on the tacit knowledge he or she has accumulated about humor through life experiences. Studying the subjective experience of the humor producer inevitably involves elucidating the tacit knowledge that leads each participant to produce a specific instance of humor at a specific point in the conversation. The framework of tacit knowledge also provides a lens through which I interpret spontaneous humor production, an act that is intentional but not always *consciously* intentional.

Epistemological Stance

A study of the humor producer's subjective experience is inherently phenomenological in nature. My goal in this study is to understand each participant's unique experience of producing humor as well as to identify any core meanings or essences of this experience that emerge across participants. Patton (2002) explained that phenomenological studies "focus on exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness . . . how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (p. 104). I want to

understand each participant's interpretation of his or her "reality," particularly during those moments when humor emerges.

Thus my epistemological stance is constructivist, grounded in the thesis of ontological relativity, which holds that "all tenable statements about existence depend on a worldview, and no worldview is uniquely determined by empirical or sense data about the world" (Patton, 2002, p. 97). A constructivist stance contrasts with the strict empirical epistemology of natural science that suggests "there can be some kind of unmediated, direct grasp of the empirical world and that knowledge . . . simply reflects or mirrors what is 'out there'" (Schwandt, 2001). Two people in the same situation are likely to have very different conceptions of it. To some extent, the existence of such varying views (or lack thereof) determines the success of an attempt at humor. The element of surprise intensifies the humor response; the audience is not likely to find a comment funny if they have already conceptualized the same unique view the producer highlights through joking. Alternatively, the audience may fail to find a comment funny because their interpretation of the situation does not match the humor producer's perspective. The audience has to understand a humorous interjection in order to react to it. The variability in humor production, interpretation, and response reveals ontological relativity in action.

Schwandt (2001) wrote that:

> Constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience. . . .

> [Constructivists] seek to understand how social actors recognize, produce, and reproduce social actions and how they come to share in an intersubjective understanding of specific life circumstances." (pp. 30-32)

Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR), the method I used to gather data, involves a researcher videotaping individuals while they are relating to each other. Subsequently, the researcher shows the recording to each individual who has engaged in the behavior of interest and guides him or her though the process of evaluating his or her thoughts, feelings, and intentions during specific portions of the interaction. The inquirer's goal is to help participants translate their subjective experiences into explicit language--to guide the participants to verbally describe how they construct the experience of humor production. Thus, the IPR method is a natural fit for a phenomenologically-oriented study grounded in a constructivist epistemology.

The method I used to analyze my data, emergent thematic analysis, is also an excellent match for this study. Braun and Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data [that] minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail" (p. 79). In emergent or inductive thematic analysis, the researcher develops codes directly from interview data (Boyatzis, 1998), allowing the participants' constructions of experience to drive the study. Again, the goal of this study is to understand the humor producer's experience, and emergent thematic analysis facilitates a rich description and analysis that stays as close as possible to the participant's lived experience.

Owning My Perspective

Patton (2002) strongly encourages each qualitative researcher to own her unique voice and perspective. Similarly, phenomenological researchers advocate the process of bracketing – setting aside everyday assumptions--to increase the chance that the researcher will keep her personal views and assumptions bounded and separate from the data that emerges throughout the study (Schwandt, 2001). Therefore, I spent considerable time pondering and writing about my experiences with and beliefs about humor. Below are key points that emerged through this process:

- I associate humor with close personal relationships, connection, and affection. My most treasured relationships are with people who laugh easily or enjoy making others laugh.
- I view humor not only as a mechanism for developing and maintaining a relationship but also as a sign that a relationship has moved to a comfortable, more intimate level. I feel accepted when engaged in friendly banter.
- A relationship exists between humor and intelligence. The ability to quickly see a situation through a unique lens--and to spontaneously craft a funny comment about it--requires intellectual ability.
- A relationship exists between interpersonal sensitivity and spontaneous humor production. People who interject humor into a conversation--especially those whose attempts at humor tend to lead to

laughter--are unusually tuned in to the underlying dynamics in interpersonal interaction and, through humor, respond to them.

- Humor is essential to living a happy life. People who don't appreciate humor are missing out on a fundamental element of the human experience.
- Humor generally functions beneath the surface of an interaction. People are likely to feel a shift in the conversation when someone interjects humor, but they probably do not label or recognize this shift consciously.
- I am uncomfortable with "put-down humor," using humor to disparage another person. An important difference exists between maliciously *making fun of* someone and playfully *poking fun at* someone.
- I am often intimidated by gifted humor producers. I feel pressure to perform, to match the speed and intelligence of their banter. I do not think of myself as being especially funny. With certain groups of people, I can be funny, but I've always envied naturally funny people.

This study provides the opportunity for deep learning about a topic that is personally meaningful and relevant, and I clearly have some pre-existing ideas about humor. I have attempted to bracket these views throughout my research and actively searched for data that contradicted my implicit beliefs.

Organization of this Dissertation

In this chapter, I have provided an introduction to the dissertation including a definition of humor, a discussion of the purpose of the study, my interest in the topic of humor, the importance of the topic, and my epistemological stance.

In Chapter Two I review relevant literature from the field of humor studies, explaining how a study of the spontaneous humor producer's experience adds meaningfully to the literature. I also review research on tacit knowledge, which provides theoretical grounding for this study.

In Chapter Three I introduce the methods I used to gather and analyze data, Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) and Emergent Thematic Analysis. I explain my reasons for selecting these methods, describe the protocol for the study, and discuss potential ethical issues.

In Chapter Four I present data from IPR interviews and the Emergent Thematic Analysis, detailing the study's core basic findings and themes.

In Chapter Five I discuss the results of the data analysis, revisit the literature I reviewed in Chapter 2, review limitations of the study, present recommendations for future study, and explain implications for leadership research and practice.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

Definition of Humor

Humor is an extremely broad concept, and its meaning varies greatly across cultures and social situations. A comment or behavior considered humorous in one context may be interpreted quite differently in another. The literature reflects this definitional variety; even scholars within the same discipline often conceptualize humor differently.

Humor may be viewed as a stimulus (the comment or behavior that leads to a humor response), a response (the reaction to humor itself), or a disposition (a trait of the person initiating, interpreting, or responding to the humor) (Chapman & Foot, 1976). Very few researchers explicitly identify their conceptualization of humor, making it difficult to determine what variable they are actually studying. Scholars have repeatedly emphasized the difficulties of defining the concept satisfactorily (Apte, 1985). Cooper (2008) suggested "the expansiveness of this construct [humor] requires that researchers place bounds on the specific aspect of humor that is their object of interest" (p. 1089).

Responding to this advice, I adopt the following definition of humor: Humor is a spontaneous and intentional verbal or nonverbal instance of communication that any of the interacting parties perceives as amusing. Below, I explore each element of this definition.

Humor is spontaneous and intentional. Humor scholars differentiate between spontaneous, conversational humor and standardized or canned humor

(Fry, 1963; Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993; Martin, 2007; Mulkay, 1988). Standardized humor refers to "prepackaged humorous anecdotes that people memorize and pass on to one another" (Martin, 2007, p. 11), while spontaneous humor occurs more naturally during the course of conversation. When a person interjects a canned joke, the joke may have little obvious relationship to the ongoing human interaction, but spontaneous humor generally originates directly from the ongoing interpersonal process (Fry, 1963).

The connotation of the word "spontaneous" differs slightly from its commonly accepted meaning when it is used in the context of humor. Spontaneity is often associated with descriptors such as "involuntary," "impulsive, and "automatic" (*Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2009), words that imply the absence of intention. However, people who produce spontaneous humor act with *intention*. These intentions may be premeditated or relatively unconscious and instantaneous, but they are *spontaneous* because they arise in the midst of an interaction; they are not jokes disconnected from the current moment.

Defining humor as intentional excludes inadvertent or accidental communication or behavior that leads to amusement. For example, an audience may find it funny when a man accidentally trips and falls, but the man on the floor has not *intentionally* produced humor. Research on humor production and, thus, humor producers' intentions, is scarce. Therefore, the definition used in this study does not limit the nature of the producer's intentions. Many

definitions of humor indicate that all humor producers intend to amuse others. For example, Winick (1976) defined humor as "any communication with a witty or funny intent that is known in advance by the source" (p. 557). Fine (1984) identified it as "remarks . . . which have as their intent the creation of amusement . . . in an audience" (p. 84). Research on the *functions* of humor indicates that humor sometimes leads to undesirable outcomes such as disparaging others (Bergson, 1911; LaFave, Haddad, & Maeson, 1976; Levine, 1969; Zillman & Cantor, 1976; Zillman & Stocking, 1976), controlling others' behaviors (Holmes, 2000; Martineau, 1972), and marginalizing specific people or groups of people (Cockburn, 1991; Davies, 1982, 1988; Duncan et al., 1990). While *function* should not be confused with *intent*, this research suggests it is reasonable to assume that motivations other than amusement may drive humor production.

Humor may be expressed verbally or nonverbally. Thus far, studies of humor in natural conversation have relied on audio recordings of interactions. Therefore, definitions of humor are often restricted to verbal expressions. Holmes' (2000) definition of humor, for instance, referred to "utterances," Tannen's (1984) to "statements," and Fine's (1984) to "remarks." Wyer and Collins (1992) emphasized the importance of considering humor in all of its potential forms: "the stimulus for the humorous reaction can be something that a person says, a nonverbal behavior that the person performs, or a combination of both" (p. 664). The current study incorporates videotaped data and allows for a definition that includes both verbal and nonverbal humor.

Humor exists when any of the interacting parties perceive a communication to be amusing. Humor producers may have intentions beyond being comical, but a comment or action is deemed humorous only if its *interpretation* arouses amusement. This element of the definition mirrors Martineau's (1972) own: "Humor is conceived generically to be any communicative instance which is perceived as humorous by any of the interacting parties" (p. 114). This definition includes (a) instances in which at least one member of the audience is amused by the producer's contribution *and* (b) instances in which only the producer finds his or her interjection to be comical. The latter type of humor is often excluded from definitions. A more inclusive definition is warranted in this study because I seek a rich and full understanding of humor producers' experiences. Discovering how producers experience moments in which they are the only ones who find their contribution amusing is an important aspect of this goal.

Laughter often indicates that one of the interacting parties has interpreted a comment or action as amusing or comical (Martin, 2007). Many researchers actually consider laughter to be a proxy for humor (Ruch, 1998). Laughter, however, is not a perfect marker for the existence of humor because it often occurs in situations that are devoid of humor (Chapman & Foot, 1976). For example, a person may find a comment to be offensive but may laugh anyway because others are doing so. Or a person may laugh in a hostile or derisive way at another person (Chapman, 1983). LaFave et al. (1976) pointed out that people

often laugh because they are embarrassed, afraid, or releasing tension. They also noted that sometimes an individual pretends to have "grasped the point of a joke which oversailed [*sic*] his head" by laughing (p. 80). Clearly, *laughter* may exist in the absence of *humor*.

Humor may exist in the absence of *laughter* as well. The feeling of mirth, a common emotional reaction to humor, is associated with a pattern of arousal much like the fight-or-flight response (Martin, 2007). Tensed muscles and a flushed face may indicate that an individual interprets a communication as amusing. Smiling is another common reaction to humor, and it often occurs separate from laughter. Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) referred to "chuckling and other forms of spontaneous behavior taken to mean pleasure, delight, and/or surprise" (p. 206) as markers of humor. Laughter is certainly a potential response to and indicator of humor, but it is not a required element of its definition.

Terminology. The literature includes many terms that are often used interchangeably with humor and others that describe a particular type of humor. For example, research refers to: irony, satire, self-deprecation, joking-in-conversation, teasing, double entendres, and puns (Long & Graesser, 1988). Any communication that fits the parameters established by this study's definition of humor--even one identified by a different name--is included in this literature review.

Overview of Humor Research

The variety of humor definitions and the absence of consistent terminology make it difficult to isolate studies that focus on humor *production*. The task is further complicated by the fractured nature of the humor literature in general. Martin (1998) wrote:

> Different researchers bring to the study of humor their own theoretical views, assumptions, and biases regarding personality and human nature in general, and apply the methodologies and techniques that they have learned in other fields of study. . . .[This] leads to a confusing babel [*sic*] of voices and little productive interchange among researchers from different theoretical traditions. Rather than facilitating a coherent accumulation of knowledge, the current plethora of approaches makes for a hodge-podge of diverse and often conflicting findings that are not easily integrated with one another. (p. 57)

Norrick (1993) identified 5 disciplinary bodies of humor research--philosophical, psychological, anthropological, sociological, and linguistic. In addition, medical scientists, management scholars and communications researchers have also studied humor. Some overlapping interests exist across disciplines, but it is hard to identify them due to confusing terminology. For example, some studies that purport to examine the humor producer's motivations actually focus on the functions or effects of humor (for example, Levine, 1969). Duncan et al. (1990) lamented this situation when they wrote, "because studies of humor . . . have involved scholars from a multitude of disciplines, there has been no common framework for inferring general conclusions and future directions for research" (p. 256).

Scholarship of integration. Reviewing the humor literature provides an opportunity to practice the scholarship of integration--the practice of creating new knowledge by synthesizing the work of others in a new and creative way (Boyer, 1990). Searching for a new lens through which to view the humor literature, I developed the organizational scheme below (see Figure 2.1). The scheme is a guide for locating individual studies and relating them to each other. I conducted a broad survey of the humor literature and classified each study according to the following categories: context of humor, evolutionary roots of humor, humor production, humor interpretation and appreciation, or humor functions. I identified the topic and/or variables of interest in each study, ignoring confusing terminology that often masked its true focus.

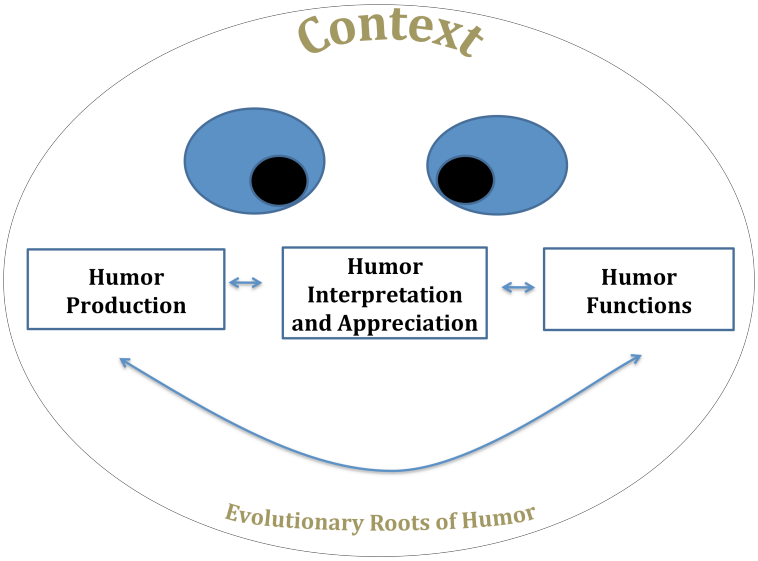

Figure 2.1. Organizational scheme for humor literature

Some studies fell into more than one category of the organizational scheme. However, classifying humor research in this manner provides a rough estimate of the quantity of research dedicated to each component of the humor

scheme. Most humor research focuses on the functions of humor, including the physical, psychological, and social outcomes of humor. A significant body of research also focuses on humor interpretation and appreciation, examining how and why people find certain communications to be humorous. Very little research addresses humor production--how and why people create and share humor.

Humor theories. Before reviewing research in each category of the organizational scheme, it is important to introduce three major humor theories: superiority, incongruity, and relief (Carrell, 2008). These theories "constitute the seminal research on humor, forming the conceptual basis for humor scholarship in different fields . . . and are often cited by organizational scholars doing research on humor" (Cooper, 2008, p. 1094). Although the theories claim to address the broad topic of humor, each theory focuses strongly on one category of the organizational scheme and has implications for the others; none of the three theories provides a complete picture of humor (Martin, 2007). Scholars have proposed additional theories of humor, but they are either subsumed under the heading of one of the three main theories or have not received enough attention within the literature to warrant discussion here (Cooper, 2008; Carrell, 2008).

Superiority theory. Superiority theory focuses on the motivation to *produce* humor. The theory emerged in the writings of Plato and Aristotle as early as 428 B. C. Variations of the theory include disparagement, malice,

hostility, derision, and aggression theories. They are all rooted in the idea that people produce humor to disparage another person or one's self. Suls (1977) suggested that we seek opportunities to "laugh at other people's infirmities, particularly those of our enemies" (p. 41). Superiority theory may explain why people engage in slapstick comedy, practical jokes, laughter at others' mistakes, and jokes that make fun of ethnic groups (Martin 2007).

Some scholars have suggested that superiority theory clarifies why people find humor funny; people "perceive a situation [as] humorous when we feel superior to either our former sense of self or others" (Clouse & Spurgeon, 1995, p. 7). Superiority theory may also explain why one potential *function* of humor is to marginalize specific individuals or groups (Cockburn, 1991; Davies 1982, 1988; Duncan et al., 1990). Little evidence supports the view that all humor involves some form of hostility or derision, but most researchers agree that humor is sometimes associated aggression (Martin, 2007).

Incongruity theory. Incongruity theory, the most common general conception of humor (Wyer & Collins, 1992), addresses the cognitive aspects of perceiving, *interpreting, and appreciating* humorous communications. Cooper (2008) traced this theory back to Kant, Kierkegaard, Bergson, and Koestler who suggest that people evaluate a communication as humorous when they recognize incongruity--that something within the communication is "inconsistent with the expected rational nature of the perceived environment" (Lynch, 2002, p. 428). Humor begins with one interpretation of the communication, and then a second

contradictory interpretation is suddenly activated (Martin, 2007). Humorous communications are "incongruous, surprising, peculiar, unusual, or different from what we normally expect" (Martin, 2007, p. 63). Some theorists suggest that the mere perception of incongruity makes something funny (Nerhardt, 1977) while others believe that the resolution of the incongruity is key (Shultz, 1972; Suls, 1972). Incongruity theory, unlike superiority theory, continues to inspire significant amounts of theorizing and research. For example, Wyer and Collins' (1992) comprehension-elaboration theory of humor elicitation, a relatively comprehensive theory of humor interpretation and appreciation that I discuss later in this chapter, is rooted in incongruity theory.

Relief theory. The chief focus of relief theory is the *function* of humor. While many versions of relief theory exist, they all propose that responses to humor (such as laughter) serve as a physiological vent for nervous energy (Morreall, 1983). Lynch (2002) wrote, "when a joke or laughter is used to reduce tension or stress, humor can be considered to provide a relief function" (p. 427). People respond to humor because tension has built up in their bodies, and laughter serves as a release valve.

Some may connect relief theories to humor *production* (as opposed to humor *functions*), especially the most cited version attributed to Freud (1960). He proposed that joking was a both a "defense mechanism by the ego and super-ego to reject reality and protect itself from suffering . . . [and] a means by which people could disguise and release their sexual or aggressive impulses without

guilt, giving them relief from these urges" (Cooper, 2008, p. 1096). Thus, Freud conceptualized humor as a motivation to *produce* humor in hopes of gaining relief from tension. However, Freud's theory has generally fallen out of favor with humor scholars. As relief theories have evolved, the focus has shifted to the relief *function* of humor and laughter. For example, current studies grounded in relief theory take place in the fields of biology, medicine, neuropsychology, and/or clinical psychology and investigate the health benefits of humor--benefits that may derive from the physiological relief function of humor (Martin, 2007).

Categories in the organizational scheme. This section of the literature review provides a brief explanation of each organizational scheme category. The model (Figure 2.1) implies that a discussion of humor production should precede an examination of other categories; however, research on humor production is most relevant to the current study and warrants a more detailed examination at the end of this section.

Context and evolutionary roots of humor. The evolutionary roots of humor and the context in which humor occurs affect all aspects of the humor process--its production, interpretation, appreciation, and functions. Evolutionary theories represent nature-based explanations of humor while research on context provides nurture-based justifications. On one hand, humor and laughter are essential human capabilities that have evolved over time because of their adaptive benefits. Darwin considered laughter to be an innate

expression of joy or happiness that has survival value as a mechanism of social communication (cited in Martin, 1998). On the other hand, the success or failure of particular attempts at humor is socially determined. Duncan and Feisal (1989) explained, "all humor is situation-specific, and it can only be interpreted within the context of the group where it occurs" (p. 29). Thus, people are predisposed biologically to produce, interpret, and appreciate humor in general, but context shapes individual humor development and determines the effectiveness, appropriateness, and function of each humor communication.

Three key bodies of research point to an evolutionary explanation for humor. First, humor exists in all human social groups, even within groups that are isolated from other human cultures (Martin, 2007; Mulkay, 1988). Second, laughter emerges early in life as an expression of amusement. Infants begin to laugh at social stimuli at approximately four months of age, and even children who are born blind and deaf laugh normally (Martin, 2007). Third, humor is adaptive in many ways that may have led to its "staying power" as a human characteristic.

Gervais and Wilson (2005) suggested humorous peoples' abilities to induce positive emotions in others enable them to build strong relationships; group members are loyal to and protective of those who make them feel good, which provides an evolutionary advantage for the humorist. Miller (1997, 2000) proposed that humor is essential to sexual selection. Potential mates interpret a witty sense of humor as a sign of intellectual aptitude, a signal for "good genes."

Thus, "over time, genes involved in the formation of brain systems underlying humor creation and appreciation would proliferate in the population" (Martin, 2007, p. 187).

Context includes variables such as the culture and norms of the country or organization within which humor occurs (Davies, 1982; Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993; Hatch, 1997; Schnurr, Marra & Holmes 2007), norms of the group within which the humor emerges (Pogrebin & Poole, 1988), the nature of the relationship between a humor producer and his or her audience (Bates, 1984; Bradney, 1957; Meisiek & Yao, 2005; Norrick, 2003; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952; Robert & Yan, 2007), the demographics of the humor producer and his or her audience (Davies, 1990), and characteristics of the physical environment (Meisiek & Yao, 2005). For example, Bates (1984) found that that the quality of the relationship between two people influences the type and amount of humor that emerges between them; the same type of humor was perceived as serving different functions in different types of relationships. Hatch and Erlich (1993) suggested that humor is likely to be most prevalent within organizational cultures that are infused with paradoxes and ambiguities. Taylor and Bain (2003) studied different call centers and found that "the particular combinations of managerial culture, attitudes to trade unionism and dissent, and the nature of oppositional groups helped impart a different character to humour between the two call centers" (p. 1487). The current study took place in the context of natural conversation during organizational meetings, but all other aspects of the context

differed for each participant group. I discuss research about humor in the workplace and humor during meetings later in this chapter.

Humor interpretation and appreciation. Neuropsychologists, cognitive scientists, linguists, and communication scholars have investigated humor interpretation and appreciation. "Interpretation" (sometimes called "comprehension" or "detection") refers to the way people process and understand an instance of humor, and "appreciation" refers to the feeling of mirth and enjoyment people experience as a result of that interpretation. Neuropsychological studies use fMRI scans to monitor brain processes as participants listen to or watch humorous communications. These studies confirm that interpretation and appreciation are separate processes that take place sequentially but in different areas of the brain; however, some disagreement remains regarding which areas of the brain are involved (Bartolo, Benuzzi, Nocetti, Baraldi, & Nichelli, 2006; Goel & Dolan, 2001; Moran, Wig, Adams, Janata, & Kelley, 2004).

Cognitive, linguistic, and communication theories of humor interpretation and appreciation are generally rooted in incongruity theories of humor and focus on how people interpret and appreciate jokes, stand-up comedy, and/or cartoon humor. Most adopt the premise that humor interpretation and appreciation begin with the recognition of an incongruity, when a person's initial understanding of a situation or communication is suddenly joined by a second contradictory interpretation (Martin, 2007). Shultz and Scott (1974) explained,

"the incongruity in a joke increases one's level of cognitive arousal and the resolution reduces the arousal back to baseline. This rapid sequence of arousal induction and reduction is thought to produce the pleasure involved in humour appreciation"(pp. 421-422). Several prominent theories of humor interpretation and/or appreciation emerge from and extend this basic idea: Suls' (1972) Two Stage Model, Norrick's (1986) Frame-Theoretical Analysis of Verbal Humor, and Attardo and Raskin's (1991) general theory of verbal humor.

Only two theories of humor interpretation and appreciation purport to account for spontaneous humor as well as for canned humor. Giora's (1995) graded salience hypothesis focused specifically on ironic humor and proposes that when a person interprets an ironic statement, its familiar meaning will occur to them before they retrieve less salient meanings. The interpreter holds the salient, literal meaning in his or her mind as the less familiar meaning is activated in order to "compute the difference between the (usually desirable) state of affairs alluded to by the literal meaning and the less desirable, ironicized [*sic*] situation" (Giora, Fein, & Schwartz, 1998, p. 83). The incongruity between the two activated meanings causes the interpreter to experience the communication as humorous (Martin, 2007). Also, the added processing that irony demands means that it takes longer to understand an ironic communication than a non-ironic one. The results of several studies supported Giora's hypothesis (Giora et al., 1998; Giora & Fein, 1999).

Wyer and Collins' (1992) and Wyer's (2004) comprehension-elaboration theory posited that (1) humor always involves reinterpreting a communication as being less serious or less important than it first seemed, and (2) the intensity of a humor response is greatest when an intermediate amount of time and effort is required to activate the re-interpretation. Research has provided more support for the first hypothesis than the second (Cunningham & Derks, 2005; Derks, Staley, & Haselton, 1998). Unfortunately, little research has investigated the comprehension-elaboration theory in the context of naturally occurring, spontaneous humor.

Humor functions. The majority of literature in the field of humor studies focuses on the functions or outcomes of humor, the effects of and/or responses to humor. Many of the published articles about humor's functions are theoretical, proposing a new model or explaining the rationale for a link between humor and specific outcomes (Clouse & Spurgeon, 1995; Cooper, 2005; Forester, 2004; Francis, 1994; Kahn, 1989; Lynch, 2002; Meisiek & Yao, 2005; Meyer, 2000; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006; Romero & Pescosolido, 2008; Suls, 1972). Empirical studies of humor functions utilize a wide range of methods, the most predominant of which are: analyzing the results of self-reports (Graham, 1995), correlating self-reports of humor use with specific outcome variables (Avtgis & Taber, 2006; Sala, Krupat, & Rotter, 2002), performing factor analyses of self-report instruments (Graham et al., 1992), analyzing the texts of jokes (Davies, 1982), observing and interpreting real-time or taped interactions from the

perspective of the researcher (Boxer & Cortes-Conde, 1997; Sala et al., 2002; Tracy, Myers & Scott, 2006), and asking participants to analyze and/or respond to hypothetical or videotaped scenarios (Dews, Kaplan, & Winner, 1995; Dews & Winner, 1995).

Research reveals that humor may provoke positive and/or negative responses as well as have positive and/or negative effects on individuals, groups, and organizations. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this dissertation focuses on humor that leads to amusement and, thus, did not capture humor that evoked negative responses. Distinguishing between so-called "positive" and "negative" humor involves a great deal of subjective judgment. For example, humor sometimes serves as an acceptable way for lower status individuals to express disagreement or dissatisfaction with upper level management (Holmes & Marra, 2002c; Rodrigues & Collinson, 1995). Rodrigues and Collinson (1995) studied a union newspaper that translated employees' dissatisfaction with management into "sharp satirical cartoons, metaphors, and stories" (Rodrigues & Collinson, 1995, p. 758). Union members saw the newspaper and its humor as a positive and proactive way to air their grievances. Not surprisingly, company leaders disagreed; in fact, they actively tried to stop and then to ignore the newspaper. Company leadership would most likely have identified the newspaper's humor as negative. This section of the literature review focuses on functions commonly associated with positive responses or outcomes, but it is important to remember

that the viewpoints of the parties involved in producing and interpreting humor (as well as the worldview of the researcher) strongly affect this designation.

On an individual level, humor may have physical, psychological, and/or social impacts. *Physically*, it may:

- enhance overall health (Fry, 1992; Martin, 2007),
- reduce pain (Cogan et al., 1987),
- lower blood pressure (Martin et al., 1993),
- boost the autoimmune system (Berk et al., 1989),
- enhance respiration (Berk et al., 1989), and
- relieve tension and stress (Buchman, 1994; Cogan et al., 1987; Martin & Lefcourt, 1983; Smith & Powell, 1988; Tracy et al., 2006).

Psychologically, humor may:

- enhance coping (Holdaway, 1983),
- relieve boredom (Roy, 1960; Taylor & Bain, 2003), and
- foster creativity (Barsoux, 1996; Consalvo, 1989; Holmes, 2007; Koestler, 1964; Smith & White, 1965).

Socially, humor may:

- facilitate the introduction of difficult topics (Civikly, 1986; Fine, 1984; Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993; Holmes, 2000; Smith & Powell, 1988),
- provide an "out" to the speaker (Clark & Gerrig, 1984; Emerson, 1969; Kane, Suls & Tedeschi, 1977; Ullian, 1976),
- facilitate self-disclosure (Bates, 1984; Cooper, 2008),

- strengthen dyadic connections (Apte, 1985; Cooper, 2008; Swartz, 1995),
- persuade another party to adopt the humorist's position (O'Quinn & Aronoff, 1981; Pogrebin & Poole, 1988),
- increase trust (Lynch, 2002), and
- ingratiate the producer to another person (Cooper, 2005; Kane et al., 1977; O'Quinn & Aronoff, 1981).

At the *group level*, research indicates that humor:

- coordinates everyday talk (LaGaipa, 1977; O'Donnell-Trujillo, & Adams, 1983; Long & Graesser, 1988; Norrick, 2003),
- translates an individual concern into a group issue (Pogrebin & Poole, 1988),
- affirms acceptance by a group (Apte, 1985; Duncan & Feisal, 1989; Scogin & Pollio, 1980),
- ameliorates conflict (Consalvo, 1989; Malone, 1980; Philbrick, 1989),
- enables group processing of difficult emotions (Hatch, 1997; Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993; Pogrebin & Poole, 1988), and
- establishes group norms (Duncan, 1962; Fine & DeSoucey, 2005; Nilsen, 1983; Norrick, 2003).

Organizational functions of humor include:

- allowing low status individuals to challenge the establishment (Holmes & Marra, 2002c; Rodrigues & Collinson, 1995),

- constructing and/or revealing culture (Hatch, 1997; Kahn, 1989; Linstead, 1985; Meisiek & Yao, 2005; Meyer, 1997),
- revealing contradictions within the organization (Hatch, 1997; Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993; Holmes & Marra, 2002a; Vinton, 1989; Meyer, 1997), and
- normalizing occupational taint (Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark, & Fugate, 2007; Clair & Dufresne, 2004).

While it is possible that humor producers are aware of humor's many functions and interject humor into a given conversation with a particular functional goal in mind, empirical research connecting spontaneous humor producers' intentions to specific functions of humor does not exist. Humor may function in ways the producer does not intend. This dissertation study focuses on the humor producer's experience of a specific instance of spontaneous humor regardless of humor's function in that situation; an analysis of how the producer's humorous communication affects entities other than the producer himself or herself is beyond the scope of the current research.

However, understanding the functions of humor that have been uncovered by existing research provides an interesting point of comparison. Humor producers' experiences and intentions may or may not align with the humor functions identified by existing research. Research on the functions of humor within contexts that are comparable to those of the current study are likely to provide the most meaningful comparisons.

Functions of spontaneous humor in the workplace. Many may consider humor and work to be mutually exclusive topics, but research indicates that this assumption is false. Duncan et al. (1990) wrote, "One of the most frequently observed phenomena at work is joking behavior; when a group of people are assembled to accomplish a task, there is always some form of joking behavior and work group humor" (p. 263). Collinson (2002) observed that "far from being austere, 'rational' and impersonal bureaucracies, workplaces are frequently characterized by multiple forms of humour and laughter" (p. 269). Workplaces provide a rich context for the study of humor.

Researchers have conducted studies in many different work contexts: a psychiatric hospital (Coser, 1960), a small, family-owned business (Vinton, 1989), a child care center (Meyer, 1997), an electric motor repair shop (Lundberg, 1969), a machine shop (Boland & Hoffman, 1983), a hotel kitchen (Brown & Keegan, 1999), a department store (Bradney, 1957), a confectionary bakery (Linstead, 1985), industrial shops (Collinson, 1988; Sykes, 1966), a university-based outpatient clinic (Yoels & Clair, 1995), IT companies (Plester & Sayers, 2007), a factory (Ullian, 1976), a petroleum exploration party (Traylor, 1973), a police department (Pogrebin & Poole, 1988), a multinational computer company (Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993), call centers (Taylor & Bain, 2003), and a zoo (Martin, 2004). Most of this research has been qualitative and observational and reveals many functions specific to the workplace, including:

- strengthening group cohesion and/or solidarity (Holmes, 2000, Martineau, 1972; Pogrebin & Poole, 1988; Scogin & Pollio, 1980; Terrion & Ashforth, 2002),
- maintaining a collegial atmosphere (Bradney, 1957; Holmes & Marra, 2006; Vinton, 1989),
- defining group and individual identity (Collinson, 1988; LaFave et al., 1976; Traylor, 1973; Yoels & Clair, 1995),
- maintaining hierarchy within the group (Boland & Hoffman, 1983; Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001),
- enhancing group performance and leadership effectiveness (Avolio et al., 1999),
- socializing new employees into an organization's culture (Brown & Keegan, 1999; Vinton, 1989),
- creating a more pleasant work environment (Vinton, 1989),
- permitting escape from the seriousness of the concerns that face the work group (Coser, 1960),
- reducing power differentials (Vinton, 1989),
- enhancing cooperation (Vinton, 1989),
- serving as a non-confrontational method of encouraging others to get their work done (Vinton, 1989), and

- revealing aspects of organizational culture (Clouse & Spurgeon, 1995; Hatch, 1997; Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993; Holmes & Marra, 2002a; Rogerson-Revell, 2007).

Some studies of humor in the workplace occur in the more specific context of meetings (Consalvo, 1989; Hatch, 1997; Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993; Holmes, 2000, 2006, 2007; Holmes & Marra 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2006; Schnurr, et al., 2007; Schnurr, 2008; Yedes, 1996). Schwartzman (1989) defined a meeting as "a communicative event that organizes interaction in distinctive ways. Most specifically a meeting is a gathering of three or more people who agree to assemble for a purpose ostensibly related to the functioning of an organization or group" (p. 61). Humor performs several different functions in meetings. In an examination of meeting transcripts from New Zealand workplaces, Holmes (2000, 2006) found that humor helps superiors maintain a position of power (2000) and defines gender relationships (2006). Holmes and Marra (2002a, 2002b, 2002c) found that humor highlights and reinforces boundaries between different social groups (2002b), reinforces workplace sub-cultures that develop within organizations (2002a), provides a socially acceptable way to criticize others, and challenges established norms and practices (2002c).

Hatch and Ehrlich (1993) and Hatch (1997) found that using humor during meetings enabled a management team to recognize and deal with contradictions and paradoxes in its organization's culture. In a study of intercultural management meetings, Rogerson-Revell (2007) found that participants--

especially members of the dominant, western, male group--used humor to show solidarity and power. Yedes (1996) observed that teasing during meetings at a non-profit organization reminded members of a group of their egalitarian relationships: "despite staff differences no one is better than anyone else" (p. 417).

Organization members spend a large proportion of their time in meetings. Rogelberg et al. (2007) found that "conservatively, the average employee spends approximately six hours per week in scheduled meetings, with supervisors spending more time than non-supervisors. . . .Senior managers attend nearly 23 hours of meetings every week" (p. 18). The prevalence of meetings in the workplace and likelihood that humor would emerge during these meetings made organizational meetings a logical context for this study. In addition, as previously mentioned, comparing the *intentions* of humor producers in the current dissertation study to the *functions* of humor I have discussed in this section of the literature review will clarify the relationship between these two concepts.

Humor and leadership. Many authors, both scholars and practitioners, suggest that a connection exists between effective leadership and the skillful use of humor (Bass, 1990; Clouse & Spurgeon, 1995; Goldstein, 1976; Holmes & Marra, 2006); however, there is relatively little empirical research on this topic (Avolio et al., 1999; Barsoux, 1996; Malone, 1980). "Perhaps of all the communicative strategies that leaders utilize," Crawford (1994) wrote, "the use

of humor is the most promising but least understood" (p. 54). More research is needed independently on both topics before the two can be connected meaningfully. Humor *production* is the focus of this dissertation study, a topic that has also been somewhat neglected by humor researchers. This dissertation, therefore, focuses on the humor that emerges during workplace meetings, regardless of whether or not a leader produces it. However, the study is positioned within a program of Leadership and Change, so it is important to explore existing research that may provide a foundation for future studies of humor production and leadership.

As with humor, many definitions of leadership exist. Rost (1993) conducted a comprehensive review of the leadership literature and ultimately proposed the following definition that will guide the current discussion: "Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (p. 102). Rost's definition emphasizes the importance of non-coercive, multidirectional influence in the relationship between leaders and followers. It also suggests the importance of a healthy, cohesive relationship between leaders and followers who must work as a united front toward common goals. One of the ways humor is hypothesized to enhance leadership is through its effect on the motivational and affective states of both leaders and followers (Avolio et al., 1999), expanding the ability of leaders and followers to influence each other positively and strengthening the bond between them that enables them to sustain a cohesive effort. Thus, Rost's

definition highlights elements of leadership that are especially pertinent to an examination of potential connections between humor and leadership.

Some of the literature relevant to the topic of leadership overtly addresses a potential relationship between humor and leadership. Other research suggests an indirect connection between humor and one specific element of Rost's (1993) definition of leadership: linking humor and influence, humor and positive relationships, or humor and cohesiveness. Both indirect and direct relationships between humor and leadership are relevant to this discussion and are, thus, reviewed below.

Studies that directly address the relationship between humor and leadership do not necessarily adhere to definitions of leadership similar to Rost's (1993). Several of the studies fail to define leadership at all. Other studies consider the concepts of leadership and management to be interchangeable. However, it is important to examine a selection of empirical studies within the humor and leadership literatures that purport to explicitly examine the relationship between these two concepts.

Philbrick (1989) conducted a study of elementary school principals in which she investigated the relationships between humor style, leadership style, and leader effectiveness. She defined leadership as "the ability to influence others" (p. 11) but was primarily interested in specific leadership styles. She found that principals who rated themselves as producers of humor--those who are likely to invent or present humor--tended to have a task-oriented leadership

style. Task-oriented leaders are very motivated to complete the task to which they and their team are assigned. Philbrick suggested that task-oriented leaders may use humor mainly to "maintain morale, which may help to keep subordinates on the task they need to complete" (p. 47). She also found that principals who rated themselves as appreciators of humor tended to display a relationship-oriented leadership style. Relationship-oriented leaders tend to seek self-esteem through positive personal relationships with others, especially followers, and appear to use humor to maintain rapport by appreciating the offerings others. While Philbrick's results do not provide clear support of a connection between leadership as defined by Rost (1993) and humor, they do propose an explanation for how and why humor may benefit certain types of leaders in specific situations.

Avolio et al. (1999) were also interested in examining possible links between humor and leader effectiveness. They did not propose a single definition of leadership but, instead, investigated "how humor moderated the impact of leadership on performance by comparing the use of humor in three different leadership styles: transformational, contingent reward, and laissez-faire" (p. 220). The results indicated that as contingent reward leaders' use of humor increases, scores on their performance appraisals and ratings of their units' performance decrease. However, using humor may benefit laissez-faire leaders by reducing some of the negative individual and unit performance outcomes that are commonly associated with this leadership style. For

transformational leaders, use of humor did not have a significant effect on leaders' performance appraisals, but it did have a positive effect on unit performance. The results of this study indicate that the connection betweens humor, leadership style, leader performance, and unit performance are complex. Humor use is likely to be beneficial to some leaders and their organizational outcomes but detrimental to others.

In 2000, Fabio Sala conducted a study designed to examine the relationship between "executives' spontaneous use of humor and effective leadership" (p. viii). He tracked the frequency of candidates' humor production during selection interviews and measured leader effectiveness via ratings of executives by knowledgeable people within the organization and the size of the annual bonus an executive received. Sala found that among executives interviewing for leadership positions, those who were identified as outstanding two years after being hired interjected three times more humorous comments than those rated as average. They also made their interviewers laugh twice as often as the executives rated as average. These results indicate that successful executives tend to use humor frequently and effectively, especially during the interview process. However, the amount of overlap between Sala's concept of managerial effectiveness and Rost's definition of leadership is unclear.

Priest and Swain (2002) share Sala's interest in examining the relationship between leader effectiveness and use of humor. They studied two samples of cadets at the United States Military Academy and, although they did not

explicitly define leadership, they measured leadership effectiveness using a scale based on the theory of transformational leadership. The measure included items that tapped the following attributes: loyalty, cohesion, satisfaction, creativity, low stress, communication, low unit conflict, performance, low unit tension, and trust. Priest and Swain found that when cadets were asked to focus their attention on "extremely good and extremely bad leaders, [they were] likely to remember the good leader was more warmly humorous than the bad leader" (p. 185). Effective leaders were rated higher in humor, even after controlling statistically for other attributes. Priest and Swain's results support the presence of a positive connection between transformational leadership and use of humor.

Cooper (2002) conducted a mixed method study exploring how managers (the proxy for "leaders" in this study) use humor to create and maintain relationships with their subordinates. She found that the tone of a manager's humor moderates the impact of that humor on leader member exchanges (LMX); humor with a positive tone is effective, and humor with a negative tone is detrimental. A manager's humor affects the quality of the leader-subordinate relationship through its effect on the amount of respect and loyalty a subordinate feels toward the manager. Managers' use of positive humor also favorably affects organizational outcomes such as organizational citizenship behaviors, job satisfaction, and turnover.

Humor and influence. One area of research that suggests an indirect relationship between humor and leaders investigates the connection between

humor and influence. As the structure of organizations evolves away from traditional hierarchies of power, the demand for leaders who are capable of garnering the support and cooperation of employees/followers over whom they have no formal authority will continue to grow. In this context, Barsoux (1996) suggested that humor is likely to play an increasingly important role in organizational interactions. Humor enables leaders to make suggestions or requests in a non-demanding manner: to "do power in an acceptable way in a society which values collegiality and resents heavy-handed authoritarianism" (Holmes & Marra, 2006, p. 131). Michael Burger, a consultant who helps leaders infuse their communications with humor agreed that "executives don't realise [*sic*] how effective humor can be . . . if you get people in a relaxed mood, they're much more receptive" (cited in Davis & Kleiner, 1989, p. ii).

Humor also provides an avenue through which followers may influence their leader. Followers may sometimes avoid delivering difficult messages to their leaders, but humor "provides a means of communicating criticism, frustrations, or fears without being branded a troublemaker by bosses, or indeed, a whistleblower, by colleagues" (Barsoux, 1996, p. 503). Ullian (1976) reinforced this idea, suggesting that humor is often used to transfer information that is socially risky to the initiator. Thus, the humor literature points to humor as a potential attractive means of influence within the leader-follower relationship.

Humor and positive relationships. In addition to serving as a tool of influence, humor aids in the creation of positive, long-lasting, and trusting

relationships between leaders and followers (Bolinger, 2001, p. 1). As Victor Borge wrote, "Laughter is the shortest distance between two people" (cited in Swartz, 1995, p. 21). In her dissertation research, Swartz (1995) examined the importance of humor to relationships. She conducted interviews with 28 participants and, using a grounded theory approach, concluded that humor plays a key role in a wide range of relationships, from casual to intimate relationships. Through "increasing liking and attractiveness of individuals, facilitating social interaction, and conveying feelings and emotions" (p. 19), humor helps create a favorable context for relationship development. By assisting in "creating intimacy and solidarity, dealing with difficult issues, managing relational boundaries, providing perspective and safety, and promoting growth" (p. 24) humor enables existing relationships to deepen and grow.

Barsoux (1996) suggested that humor--especially self-deprecating humor--may aid in the building of positive relationships by reducing the inhibitions that often result from status differences: "By laughing at imperfections in themselves, leaders open up the way to a more honest dialogue. Their readiness to admit their own limitations makes them seem more human and approachable" (p. 502). Bullock (as cited in Philbrick, 1989) agreed, suggesting that humor reduces the social distance between people. While humor alone is likely to be insufficient grounds for establishing positive relationships among leaders and followers,

evidence indicates that it may be valuable in facilitating and enhancing the relationship development process.

According to Rost (1993), a positive relationship between leaders and followers boosts a team's ability to work toward their common goal in a unified or cohesive manner. In addition to smoothing the path to positive relationship formation, humor may also work through several channels to improve and maintain team cohesiveness. First, humor may strengthen the bond among team members. Robert Orben, who has written over 40 books about humor, views humor as "a bonding device . . . if you can laugh together, you can work together" (as cited in Davis & Kleiner, 1989, p. ii). Joking or using humor during interactions is an effective way to make people feel that they are accepted members of the team (Duncan & Feisal, 1989). In a study of nine diverse, task-oriented work groups, Duncan (1984) found that members of cohesive work groups were more often involved as both the initiator and focus of humor than were those in non-cohesive work groups.

Humor and cohesiveness. Humor also aids cohesiveness by easing social conflicts and relieving tension within teams (Malone, 1980; Philbrick, 1989). In a study of humor in team meetings, Consalvo (1989) found that consensual laughter during conflict moved team members away from attitudes of hostility and stubbornness, enabling the team to avoid a potential impasse.

Humor may also enhance cohesiveness by signaling the strength or weakness of a team's cohesion at a specific point in time. It is extremely unlikely

that humor will develop within an environment of defensiveness and distrust (Consalvo, 1989). Thus, the presence of humor may indicate a healthy, cohesive team atmosphere. Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee (2002) indicated that "in any work setting . . . laughter signals the group's emotional temperature, offering one sure sign that people's hearts as well as their minds are engaged" (p. 11). Consalvo (1989) also found that humor "reveals group process, . . . where a group is, how it is progressing in meetings, and where divergent interest compete" (p. 285). By paying attention to the presence or absence of humor within a team, both the leader and team members (or followers) may recognize the presence of potential barriers to cohesiveness, thus providing an opportunity to address problems before they fester and grow into more significant impediments to progress.

Drawing overarching conclusions about the relationship between leadership and humor is difficult. Existing research suffers due to the absence of a consistent theoretical framework and a lack of definitional agreement. The research, however, presents a strong argument for further study. Evidence indicates that humor may assist leaders in influencing their followers, developing positive relationships, and fostering cohesive teams. Followers also appear to view leaders (or managers) who utilize humor appropriately as being more effective than leaders who do not. The literature also provides preliminary guidance to leaders regarding complimentary leadership and humor styles. This dissertation study adds to this literature by providing an understanding of the

spontaneous humor producer's experiences. The results provide leaders, as well as others who employ humor, a deeper understanding of the way they interact with and influence people.

Humor production. The studies reviewed immediately above focus on the functions of humor, the roles it plays and how it *affects* natural conversation, interactions and relationships in the workplace, and leadership. Very little research addresses humor production (sometimes referred to as humor "creation"), the generation and communication of humor. In a comprehensive review of the humor research literature, McGhee (1971) noted that less than 10 percent of humor studies dealt with humor production, and Robinson and Smith-Lovin's (2001) more recent review revealed a similar pattern. Of those studies that address humor production, only one deals with the internal process of creating humor from the perspective of the producer (see Siegler, 2003), and very few include spontaneous humor (Goodchilds, 1972; Heath & Blonder, 2005; McGhee, 1980; Turner, 1980). Thus, this section of the literature review casts a wide net, attempting to explain what existing research tells us about humor producers and the humor production process. It includes research on canned humor and studies that take place outside of a social environment. Although such studies are not directly applicable to the current research, they paint a picture of the landscape within which the study is grounded. In addition, the results sensitized me to topics, issues, and variables that are potentially relevant to a study of humor producers' subjective experiences.

Measuring humor production. A review of the measurement techniques used to study humor production reveals a paucity of methods that include spontaneous humor, the humor producer's perspective, and/or real-time humorous behaviors. The most common assessment methods are joke or scenario completion tests, self-report instruments, peer rating forms, captioning exercises, and performance tests:

- Joke or scenario completion tests ask participants to select or create the best punch lines or endings to jokes or hypothetical scenarios (Derks & Hervas, 1988; Feingold, 1983; Feingold & Mazella, 1993; Goldsmith, 1979; Shultz and Scott, 1974).
- Self-report instruments ask participants to rate the degree to which various statements describe their typical humor-related behaviors, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes (Feingold & Mazella, 1993; Martin et al., 2003).
- Peer rating forms provide an opportunity for a participant's peers to describe the typical quality and/or quantity of his or her humor (Craik & Ware, 1998; Dewitte & Verguts, 2001; Heath & Blonder, 2005).
- Captioning exercises instruct participants to generate funny captions for cartoons or pictures. Usually, researchers count the number of captions each participant produces and/or judges rate the funniness of each caption (Babad, 1974; Brodinsky & Rubien, 1976; Clabby, 1980;

Feingold & Mazella, 1993; Koppel & Sechrest, 1970; Nevo, 1984; Nevo, Aharonson, & Klingman, 1993; Siegler, 2003).

- Performance tests generally require participants to present researcher-generated jokes or a researcher-generated short monologue to a panel of judges who rate the funniness of the performance (Turner, 1980; Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1995).

Sentence completion, captioning, and performance tests all measure participants' ability to produce planned humor unrelated to a social interaction. Some self-report and peer assessments include items meant to assess spontaneous humor production. For example, one of the items on the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ), a self-report instrument is: "I usually can't think of witty things to say when I'm with other people" (Martin et al., 2003). However, none of the most prevalent methods of measuring humor production directly appraises humorous behavior. As Holmes (2000) wrote, "Self-report data, interview responses, and answers gleaned from questionnaires involving simulated situations tend to elicit people's beliefs about how they and others use humour rather than reliable information on what they actually do" (p.161). In addition, self-reports measure one aspect of producers' perspectives--their descriptions of the type of humor they believe they use and how often they think they produce it--but do not tap the internal experience or motivations behind specific interjections of humor.

One body of research, a series of studies that attempt to characterize humor producers (or "wits") in small group interactions, utilized a researcher-observer to identify real-time humorous interjections during the course of social interaction (Goodchilds, 1959; Goodchilds, 1972; Goodchilds & Smith, 1964; Smith & Goodchilds, 1959, 1963; Smith & White, 1965). Smith and Goodchilds (1959) did not accomplish their goal of creating consistent descriptions of witty peoples' personalities, but they introduced the "Observer Wit Tally," a unique method for directly studying spontaneous humor production. The Tally relies on audience laughter as the main criterion for rating a communication as humorous: "whenever, during a monitored group discussion session, a group member said or did anything which resulted in an audible laughter-type response on the part of at least two other group members, the monitoring observer was instructed to credit that member with a witticism" (Goodchilds, 1972, p. 183). The inventory produced strong inter-rater reliabilities (.85 to .90) and correlated with self-reports and peer nominations of wittiness. Unfortunately, beyond Goodchilds and Smith's studies, researchers have not used the Observer Wit Tally--and have rarely used observational methods in general--to examine humor production. (I discuss one exception, Heath & Blonder (2005) later in this section.)

Almost all existing approaches to measuring humor production emerge from a positivist, quantitative epistemology. Edmonson and McManus (2007) suggested that qualitative methods are the best fit for areas of study that have

not yet been well developed, so it is somewhat surprising that more researchers have not approached humor production from a qualitative perspective. As I discuss in Chapter 3, the current study introduces the IPR method to the field of humor studies. This qualitative method enabled me to capture and study incidents of spontaneous humor during conversation, an element of humor production that existing methods miss.

Cognitive process of producing humor. Cognitive research on humor has focused almost exclusively on humor interpretation and comprehension rather than humor production. Martin (2007) wrote, "although there have been isolated attempts by psychologists to address the cognitive process involved in the creation of humor, this is a topic that awaits further investigation" (p. 110). Shultz and Scott (1974) conducted the first direct investigation of humor production. They hypothesized that the cognitive process involved in creating a joke is the exact opposite of the one involved in interpreting a joke: "the creator first notices an ambiguity (either linguistic or conceptual) and then creates an incongruity by responding to the hidden rather than the intended meaning of the ambiguity" (p. 422).

To test their proposition, they presented participants with either the first part of a joke (incongruity information) or the second part of the joke (resolution information) and asked them to create original jokes based on this incomplete information. As expected, they found that producers created the most jokes in

response to the resolution information, suggesting that joke creators proceed from the resolution of a joke to its incongruity.

Heath and Blonder (2005) studied humor production and appreciation in stroke patients. The portion of their study dedicated to humor *production* is most relevant to the current study. The right hemisphere of the brain has been associated with disrupting humor *interpretation* and *appreciation* (Brownell, Powelson, & Gardner, 1983; Bihrle, Brownell, & Poweslon, 1986; Shammi & Stuss, 1999; Wapner, Hamby, & Gardner, 1981). Heath and Blonder hypothesized that right hemisphere-damaged (RHD) patients would also *produce* less conversational humor than left hemisphere-damaged (LHD) and normal control patients. They assessed the frequency and funniness of patients' humor ("humor orientation") in two ways: (1) patients and their spouses rated the patients' orientation to humor before and after the stroke; and (2) raters analyzed and coded patients' conversational humor during a videotaped, semi-structured interview about their health and life experiences several months after a stroke.

RHD patients and their spouses reported a significant change in patients' orientation to humor after having a stroke; the volume and funniness of daily communication declined. Analysis of conversational humor, however, did not reveal a difference in the percentage of patient-produced humor events among RHD, LHD, and control patients. A qualitative analysis of interview data revealed that although RHD patients attempted to interject humor as frequently as LDH and control patients, others in the interview room (the recipients of the

humor) did not find many of their comments funny: RHD patients tried to communicate humor but were not successful. RHD patients apparently lack the ability to judge what others are likely to find funny. Heath and Blonder's study provides preliminary evidence that the right hemisphere of the brain plays an important role in humor production.

Although these results are not directly applicable to the current study, Health and Blonder (2005) present one of the only studies of humor production to assess spontaneous humor in conversation (interviews). Raters identified humor incidents reliably, and results of this portion of the study generated a unique variable not tapped by the Humor Orientation Scale (the scale patients and their spouses used to rate pre- and post-stroke humor). Thus, Heath and Blonder's study provides a partial precedent to the current study that investigates spontaneous humor in conversation.

Some research on the cognitive process of creating humor has emerged from the field of artificial intelligence. Binsted, Pain, and Ritchie (1997) developed a computer program called the Joke Analysis and Production Engine (JAPE) that generates punning riddles. Drawing from a vast dictionary, JAPE applies computational rules about meaning combinations and text forms to generate word pairs. The program then inserts the pairs into a riddle template. For example, JAPE generated the following riddle: "How is a nice girl like a sugary bird? Each is a sweet chick." (Ritchie, 2004, p. 147)

To evaluate JAPE's output, Binsted, Pain, and Ritchie (1997) presented children with JAPE-generated riddles, human-generated riddles, nonsense jokes, and non-humorous statements. They asked the children to identify the texts that represented jokes, to rate the funniness of the jokes, and to report whether they had heard the jokes before. Children identified JAPE riddles as reliably as the human-produced ones and easily distinguished both types from texts that were not jokes. However, they rated most of the JAPE jokes as less funny than the jokes humans had created.

While JAPE-generated jokes are not yet a perfect imitation of human jokes, initial results indicate that a set of "learnable" rules guide the production of at least some forms of humor. Artificial intelligence research needs significant development before it may be applied to more complex forms of humor such as spontaneous humor (Martin, 2007), but this research directs scholars like myself toward the possibility that humor producers may tacitly follow a set of rules when creating some types of humor.

Siegler (2003) examined the cognitive process of creating nonsocial humor by analyzing expert and novice comics' thinking as they wrote humorous captions for photographs. His study was the first to focus on the internal experience of humor production from the perspective of the producer. He framed humor creation as a problem solving process that relies on re-representation. Re-representation occurs when a person who fails to solve a problem using familiar methods arrives at a solution by "re-framing" or viewing

the problem in a new way. Siegler (2003) discovered that re-representation in humorous caption writing occurs in three phases: (1) Participants view a photograph, activating memory schemas that enable them to interpret it; (2) Participants map new frames to their initial interpretation to transform the audience's understanding of the photograph into something humorous (re-representation); and (3) Participants write a caption based on the humorous re-representation.

Elements of this cognitive process may occur when people create spontaneous humor as well. Even though a social situation and audience were absent during caption writing, expert comics considered their potential audiences when creating humor, and their captions focused on human interaction more often than novices' captions. This evidence suggests that part of expert comics' strategy when "solving the humor problem" was to imagine their potential audiences as they crafted humorous captions.

Theories and models of humor production. The term "sense of humor" has different meanings throughout the humor literature. In general, it refers to habitual differences in humor-related behavior. It may describe a person who (1) laughs at communications that a majority of people find humorous; (2) laughs frequently and is easily amused; or (3) tells humorous stories and amuses other people. One or all of these meanings may describe an individual: humor production and humor interpretation or appreciation are not necessarily intra-personally correlated (Eysenck, 1972). Lefcourt, Antrobus, and Hogg (1974)

found virtually no relationship between tendency to laugh or smile and humor production, and Lefcourt and Martin (1986) found that humor production and humor appreciation are separate, independent variables. Thus, the sense of humor literature includes studies that focus on vastly different variables, often confounding appreciation and production. Two models that conceptualize sense of humor as the tendency to *produce* humor are most relevant to the current study: Feingold and Mazella's Multidimentional Model of Wittiness and Dewitte and Verguts' selectionist theory of humor production.

Feingold and Mazella (1993) proposed that humor production (which they referred to as "wit") progresses through three stages that must take place in sequence – motivation, cognition, and communication. Humor motivation refers to how often a person thinks of comments or actions to make others laugh. Humor cognition includes a person's knowledge of common jokes and ability to reason through unfamiliar jokes, and humor communication denotes how likely a person is to communicate their humorous ideas to others. In a given situation, an individual may or may not be motivated to produce humor. If the motivation exists, the person may or may not be capable of generating a humorous idea; and if a humorous thought is conceived, the person may or may not communicate it to others. Thus, successful humor producers are likely to differ from their non-humorous counterparts "in the frequency with which the three stages are executed, the average quality of the humor communicated, and the average effectiveness with which it is communicated" (p. 440).

Feingold and Mazella (1993) conducted 3 separate studies based on this model, but their methods and results do not provide an overall assessment of the model's effectiveness. They report only correlations among the model's components and with measures of sociability, verbal ability, and scholastic orientation. In addition, Feingold and Mazella measured humor production via a cartoon captioning exercise or a scenario completion exercise, neither of which approximates the current study's concept of spontaneous humor production. Scholars have yet to pursue additional research on this model, so it serves mainly as a suggested framework for potential stages in the humor production process.

Dewitte and Verguts (2001) presented a selectionist or behaviorist theory of humor production. They proposed that successful humor producers practice by frequently making jokes and are sensitive to social cues that enable them to fine-tune their attempts at humor; successful humor producers try out a variety of approaches to humor and retain only those that are successful. Dewitte and Verguts presented their theory as a contrast to existing theories of humor that imply humor producers consciously follow a list of rules to create funny communications. Dewitte and Verguts conducted three studies to test their theory and found strong support for the frequency component: more attempts at producing humor appear to facilitate the quality of that humor. They did not find support for the social sensitivity component. The theory has not yet been subjected to additional testing, so it is impossible to know if an alternate measure

of social sensitivity would have led to different results more supportive of their hypothesis.

Dewitte and Verguts' (2001) theory is relevant to the current study for two reasons. First, the self-report item they used to tap frequency of humor production encompasses spontaneous humor: "Does the person often tell things which are meant to be funny? This question *does not concern only (complete) jokes but also remarks, exaggerations, etc*." (p. 41, emphasis added). Their theory and research suggest that successful spontaneous humor producers are likely to interject humor frequently. Second, their conceptualization of humor relates to research on tacit knowledge. They believe that humor producers learn by doing, that people develop the ability to communicate humor the same way they learn to apply the rules of grammar in their native tongue. "Theories of humor," they write, "usually provide a system of rules that can, in principle, be used to generate good jokes. . . .It is unlikely, however, that a humorist has an explicit knowledge of these rules" (p. 38). Dewitte and Verguts implicitly identified tacit knowledge as the source of humor producers' skill development. I discuss tacit knowledge research in more detail later in this chapter.

Humor style. Martin et al. (2003) proposed that people differ in the type of humor they tend to produce. Two styles of humor are considered healthy or adaptive (affiliative and self-enhancing) and two unhealthy and potentially detrimental (aggressive and self-defeating). When individuals use humor to enhance their relationships with others, they are using *affiliative* humor. For

example, they may use humor to reduce conflict, strengthen ties between individuals, raise the morale of a group, or create an atmosphere of enjoyment. On the other hand, people may use humor at the expense and detriment of their relationships. They may use *aggressive* humor that belittles and alienates others. Thus, peoples' production of humor may affect their relationships either positively and/or negatively.

People may also use humor to protect themselves, making funny comments in an attempt to cope with stress or to avoid difficult situations; Martin et al. (2003) refer to this type of humor as *self-enhancing*. However, sometimes humor impairs the self. *Self-defeating humor* occurs when an individual uses self-deprecating humor to such an extent that it may be harmful; it involves "excessively self-disparaging humor or attempts to ingratiate oneself or gain the approval of others by doing or saying funny things at one's own expense" (p. 52). Thus, people may produce humor to sustain or undermine their sense of self.

Martin et al. (2003) developed one of the most frequently used self-assessments of humor, the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ), to test their concept of humor production style. Several studies provide support for the concept, but an examination of the HSQ items reveals that the instrument measures more than just humor *production* style. Some of the items on the HSQ confound humor production with humor appreciation. For example, one question on the aggressive humor scale reads: "I do not like it when people use

humor as a way of criticizing or putting someone down." This statement describes the type of humor a participant *appreciates* (or fails to appreciate), not the type of humor the individual is likely to *produce*.

Craik and Ware (1998) also proposed that humor producers adopt specific humor styles. They developed an instrument called the Humorous Behavior Q-sort Deck that enables peers to identify the type of humor for which a participant has developed a reputation. According to Craik and Ware's research, five humor style dimensions exist: (1) socially warm versus cold; (2) reflective versus boorish; (3) competent versus inept; (4) earthy versus repressed; and (5) benign versus mean-spirited. Like the HSQ, the Humorous Behavior Q-sort Deck includes items that confuse humor appreciation with humor production. For example, two items within the Q-sort are: "Responds with a quick but short-lived smile" and "laughs at the slightest provocation" (p.74). Both of these items tap responses to humor, not humor production.

Humor orientation. Communication scholars Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) created the Humor Orientation Scale (HOS) to measure a concept similar to humor style. Like humor style, "humor orientation" refers to peoples' perceptions of how they use humor to communicate. However, the HOS measures the frequency and effectiveness of humor production as opposed to the styles of humor utilized. All but five items in this 17-item scale refer specifically to telling *jokes*, so the assessment includes but does not focus on the production of spontaneous humor.

Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield, and their students have conducted several studies that indicate the HOS is a reasonably reliable and valid instrument (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991; Wanzer et al., 1995, 1996; Merolla, 2006). People who have a strong humor orientation, those who report using humor frequently and effectively, tend to:

- use humor in a wide range of social situations (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991);
- use many different types of humor (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991);
- produce humor without substantial planning (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991);
- have a strong need to create positive impressions in their receivers (Wanzer et al., 1995);
- be aware of their emotions and allow them to guide their communication (Wanzer et al., 1995);
- tell jokes more effectively than people with low humor orientation (Wanzer et al., 1995);
- be less lonely than people with low humor orientation (Wanzer et al., 1996);
- be socially attractive to their peers (Wanzer et al., 1996); and
- demonstrate conversational sensitivity, the ability to decipher subtle meanings in others' communications (Merolla, 2006).

Research that examines the relationships between social sensitivity and humor orientation is particularly relevant to the current study. Like Dewitt and Verguts' (2001), Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) initially found that people who tend to enact humor regularly produce more humor in general, regardless of its appropriateness in a given exchange: they "produce humor without substantial planning or situational sensitivity" (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991, p. 215). In contrast, Wanzer et al. (1995) found that people with high humor orientation scores are skilled at adjusting their behaviors based on the demands of a specific social situation, and Merolla (2006) found that people who report using humor frequently and effectively are especially tuned into the subtle meanings in others' communications.

Personality and humor production. Researchers who study sense of humor as a personality characteristic have generally taken one of two approaches: (1) They attempt to identify the different traits that contribute to a sense of humor; or (2) they endeavor to locate sense of humor within existing personality models (Ruch, 1996). As in other areas of humor research, most studies of sense of humor and personality focus on humor interpretation or appreciation, not humor production. This section of the literature review describes research that explicitly addresses the personality traits associated with humor production.

Researchers have examined the traits of "field dependence and independence" and "locus of control" as they relate to humor *production*. Field dependence refers to the extent to which an individual perceives himself or

herself to be autonomous from external referents (Bertini, 2000). People who are field *de*pendent tend to be more oriented toward interpersonal cues than those who are field *in*dependent. Locus of control refers to a generalized expectancy "that pertains to the perception of causal relationships between behaviors and reinforcing experiences" (Lefcourt, 2000, p. 68). People with an external locus of control believe they can do little to change the nature of their experiences, and people with an internal locus of control believe their experiences "reflect their efforts, personal characteristics, and actions" (Lefcourt, 2000, p. 68).

Lefcourt et al. (1974) conducted a laboratory study with the goal of "assessing the likelihood of humor expression during . . . common and lifelike situations containing positive and negative reinforcements" (p. 634). They induced humor production through a role-playing exercise. Each participant partnered with a researcher to improvise exchanges that depicted successful and unsuccessful social and academic situations. Judges subsequently rated the frequency with which participants used humor and the type of humor they produced. (The judges also assessed participants' responses to researcher-generated humor, but this portion of the study is irrelevant to the current research.) Lefcourt et al. found that individuals with an internal locus of control and field *in*dependence are more likely than people with an external locus of control and field *de*pendence to produce humor in response to negative evaluative feedback. The researchers suggest that internal-field independent participants' production of humor reflects their ability to generate an adaptive,

internal shift in perspective; this shift "permits one to see himself in an absurd light [and] may help to convey the therapeutic nature of humor production" (p. 648).

Only one set of scholars who locate sense of humor within existing personality models considers humor production (Eysenck, 1942; Hehl & Ruch, 1985; John, 1990; Kambouropoulou, 1930; Martin, 1998, 2007; McCrae, Costa, & Busch, 1986; McCrae & Costa, 1980; Terry & Ertel, 1974). Kohler and Ruch (1996) conducted a factor analysis that included most existing humor inventories and several personality tests. They measured humor production via the Cartoon Punch line Test, a cartoon-captioning inventory. Judges then rated the captions in four categories: wittiness of the punch line, originality of the punch line, wit of the author, and richness of fantasy of the author.

Wittiness of punch lines, originality of punch lines, wit of the producer, and richness of fantasy of the producer were all weakly but positively correlated with the psychoticism dimension of the PEN (Psychoticism-Extraversion-Neuroticism) model (Eysenck, Eysenck, & Barrett, 1985). This dimension includes traits such as "aggressive, cold, egocentric, impersonal, impulsive, antisocial, unempathetic, creative, and toughminded" (Kohler & Ruch, 1996, p. 391). Kohler and Ruch (1996) reasoned that the creative aspect of psychoticism explains its connection to successful humor production.

Extraversion, which is characterized by traits such as "sociable, lively, active, assertive, sensation-seeking, carefree, dominant, surgent, and

venturesome" (Kohler & Ruch, 1996, p. 391), correlated positively with the number of captions created and the richness of fantasy present in the captions. Kohler and Ruch (1996) concluded that when compared to introverts, extraverts are more cheerful and less serious and, thus, are able to produce more (but not necessarily more humorous) punch lines. They did not offer an explanation for the relationship between richness of fantasy and extraversion, but perhaps people who are carefree and venturesome are more open to (or willing to share) wild, fantastical ideas.

In a separate study that also used the Cartoon Punch line Test, Ruch and Kohler (1998) found positive correlations between all aspects of humor production and the "openness" dimension of the Five Factor Model of personality (McCrae & Costa, 1987). People with elevated scores on openness are characterized as being original, daring, and imaginative and as having a broad set of interests. It is not surprising, then, that people who are high on openness also tend to produce witty, imaginative, and original cartoon captions. Considered together, Ruch and Kohler's two studies (Kohler & Ruch, 1996; Ruch & Kohler, 1998) suggest that humor producers tend to be creative and imaginative people who are generally cheerful and open to a wide range of original and fantastical ideas.

Abilities and humor production. Like Ruch and Kohler (1998), some researchers conceptualize creativity as a personality trait. Others consider it to be an ability or skill. McGhee (1980) wrote, "A higher level of creativity should

be required to create a joke, cartoon, or other humor situation, than simply to understand the same event when it is initiated by another person" (p. 122). The first scholar to suggest a connection between creativity and humor production was Arthur Koestler (1964). In *The Act of Creation*, he coined the term "bisociation," a cognitive process that involves perceiving a situation or idea within two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference. Koestler and other creativity scholars suggest that both humorists and creative people are capable of experiencing (or generating) a sudden shift in viewpoint. They simultaneously hold two possible but contradictory interpretations of a single situation or communication. Other parallels between humor and creativity exist. For example, originality, ingenuity, novelty, and surprise are commonly considered to be elements of both concepts.

O'Quin and Derks (1997) conducted a review of research investigating the relationship between humor production and creative ability; the two concepts are positively correlated across many studies using a wide range of measurement techniques for each variable. Two studies within this body of work assess spontaneous humor in the course of social interaction, and both include children as participants. In McGhee's (1980) investigation of humor production in young children, observers and teachers rated participants' overall creativity as well as the frequency of their verbal and behavioral attempts at interjecting humor. Results indicate that creativity ratings are positively correlated with frequency of humor production after age six. In their study of seventh and eleventh graders,

Fabrizi and Pollio (1987) assessed humor production via researcher and teacher observations. They found that eleventh graders who frequently produced humor scored significantly higher than other eleventh graders on a creativity assessment.

Research on the ability to self-monitor also touches upon humor production. Self-monitoring refers to "self-control of expressive behavior, self-presentation, and nonverbal affective display guided by situation cues" (Turner, 1980, p. 164). High self-monitors are generally sensitive to subtle social cues, are able to control the way they convey emotions and nonverbal messages, and are skilled in initiating and maintaining social interaction. Turner conducted two laboratory studies investigating the connection between self-monitoring (measured using a self-report called the "Self Monitoring Scale") and humor production. The first study did not incorporate spontaneous humor, but the second investigated whether high and low self-monitors would differ in their use of humor during a group discussion. Researchers explained to small groups of three to six participants that they were participating in a study about the conclusions people reach concerning various abstract problems. Researchers did not mention humor as a topic of study. The group then discussed a problem scenario and presented a solution to the researchers. At the end of the problem-solving exercise, participants completed a group discussion report that included a request to identify the individual(s) who made the most humorous remarks. Participants named high self-monitors as humor producers significantly more

often than low self-monitors. Turner concluded that "in situations in which humorous comments are appropriate, self-monitoring is positively related to the effective expression of witty statements" (p. 169).

Gender and humor production. Gender appears to affect humor production, but research on this topic is extremely limited. The gender mix of a group may affect the frequency of joking. In a study of task-oriented groups, Robinson and Smith-Lovin (2001) found that men tell more jokes in general but that women joke much more when no men are present--even more so than men in all male groups. In a study of management development groups, Smith and Goodchilds (1959) found that more men than women make jokes. Gender may also account for differences in the type of humor a person is likely to produce. Crawford and Gresley (1991) found that males report producing more hostile humor and formulaic jokes than women, and Hay (2000) found that women are more likely to produce humor that involves disclosure of personal information than men. Martin et al.'s (2003) results indicated that men are more likely than women to use humor in unhealthy ways such as producing aggressive and/or self-defeating humor. In a review of several published and unpublished studies, Holmes (2006) concluded that "women tend to produce humor that is more context-bound, spontaneous, anecdotal, and narrative in character, and tell more stories based on personal experience than men, who are more likely to recount standardized jokes" (p. 30).

Familial and childhood antecedents. Preliminary research indicates that humor producers may share similar life experiences. McGhee (1979) found that children with a well-developed sense of humor have mothers who are not especially affectionate and have had to cope with more problems and conflict than a peer group. In a study of adolescent boys, Prasinos and Tittler (1981) found that boys nominated by their peers as "funniest" reported less family cohesion and more family conflict than their peers. Fisher and Fisher (1983) studied professional comics and found that many of them described their mothers as cold or aloof: "comics were, apparently, reared by mothers who were not maternally inclined and who wanted their children to grow up as fast as possible" (p. 57). All three studies imply that successful humor producers experienced distant relationships within their families of origin (especially with their mothers) and adopted humor as a method of relating from a distance and/or as a way to cope with unhappiness or feelings of alienation.

Humor production in the workplace. A small body of research addresses how workplace power structures influence humor producers' behavior. Some studies indicate that employees with higher power status--such as managers or designated leaders--are likely to initiate more humor than others: "joking behavior follows predictable patterns, with high status group members functioning most frequently as the initiator. Lower status employees engage in joking behavior infrequently . . . and use jokes most often as a means of expressing socially risky communications" (Duncan, 1982, p. 140). A study of

staff at a medical hospital (Coser, 1960), a study of salespeople at a department store (Bradney, 1957), and a study of task-oriented work groups at a university (Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001) indicated that high status group members (such as supervisors) initiate a majority of humor. Other studies reach opposing conclusions. In a study of a petroleum exploration party, Traylor (1973) found that group members' status did not affect frequency of humor initiation, and in two studies of task-oriented groups in business firms and health care organizations, Duncan (1984, 1985) found that managers were *not* perceived to be the most frequent initiators of humor.

Duncan and Feisal (1989) identified four different types of managers and described the likelihood that each will produce humor. Arrogant executives hold positions of formal authority but are isolated from the rest of the group. They are likely to initiate humor. However, because group members do not like them, "a joke about an employee is more offensive . . . if it is told by the arrogant executive than if it is initiated by any other member of the group" (p. 24). Benign bureaucrats hold a position of authority but fail to exercise it. They are also likely to initiate humor, but group members are likely to take offense at such interjections because they do not respect them as productive members of the group. Solid citizens do not possess formal authority, but their perceived expertise gives them power over other group members. Solid citizens frequently initiate humor and "enjoy special joking privileges; they can joke about group members, even in their presence, without offending anyone" (p. 26). Finally,

novices, who are relatively new to the group and younger than other members, rarely initiate humor.

Robinson and Smith-Lovin (2001) propose that a group member's status influences the type of humor he or she is likely to produce. Based on an analysis of transcripts of conversations from 29 task-oriented groups, Robinson and Smith-Lovin concluded that low status members (women and low participators) are likely to produce a larger proportion of cohesion-building humor while high status members (men and high participators) are likely to produce a larger proportion of differentiating humor. Differentiating humor breaks down the sense that "we're all in this together" and points out distinctions among group members; group members are likely to use it to establish or maintain hierarchy within a group. In addition, high status members are more likely than low status members to produce differentiating humor that is directed at another member (or subset of members) of the group. The research above indicates that an individual's power status within a group is likely to influence the frequency with which he or she produces humor.

Cultural role of the humor producer. A rich anthropological literature exists about the societal role of fools, jesters, or institutionalized clowns (Apte, 1985; Kets de Vries, 1993): "the fool, in the sense of a person who is characteristically witty, is universally present in the human group" (Goodchilds, 1972, p. 177). Across a wide range of cultures, one major role of these designated humor producers is to speak truth to power. Kets de Vries writes:

> With their use of humor, fools can do the otherwise unthinkable, trespassing the forbidden territory and satirizing both leaders and followers. They provide an outlet for the most basic antisocial feelings and, by creating absurd situations, articulate the fears and anxieties of others. . . .It is difficult to hold fools responsible for their actions, as fools seem to have some protective immunity. Something said in jest does not carry the same weight as it does in ordinary communication. (p. 99)

In some cultures fools perform elaborate acts only during rituals, celebrations, or religious ceremonies while in others they are expected to play the jester role on a day-to-day basis. For example, jesters are often associated with royal courts where their role was to critique the king, using humor to soften criticism. Fisher and Fisher (1983) position modern comedians and clowns as the fools of today and write that "the modern comic plays the fool . . . but he dares to deal with all the themes that are taboo and 'off limits' and [does] so in a way that serves to deny their threatening implications" (p. 58).

Kets de Vries (1993) suggests that the role of the fool is still necessary in organizations today. He cites excessive pride and arrogance as recurring themes in leadership: "narcissism, which is a key force behind the desire for leadership and power, frequently becomes pronounced once leadership and power are attained" (p. 94). He suggests that the antidote to narcissistic leaders is the organizational fool, "a courageous individual who is willing to challenge the leader and give him or her a different perspective, free from sycophancy" (p. 102). In Kets de Vries' conceptualization, humor is one of many tools available to the organizational fool. Some of the individuals who spontaneously produce humor in organizational meetings (the context of the current study) may

display characteristics of the organizational fool, creatively challenging leadership or soothing the fears of fellow employees.

Summary of humor production research. While knowledge of the research I have reviewed above is helpful, this review accentuates the need for this dissertation study. Existing research does not address the core question of the current study: What is the subjective experience of the spontaneous humor producer? Research grossly over-represents the frequency of canned humor. Spontaneous humor occurs much more frequently than canned humor in everyday exchanges, but very little research addresses it. In addition, much research on humor production reflects researchers' perceptions as opposed to producers' perceptions. Researchers draw conclusions about why individuals contribute humor based on the *effects* of that humor on the social situation. When humor producers' perspectives are acknowledged, it is only through survey-based self-reports that may not be connected to actual humor production. Data about spontaneous humor producers' subjective experiences as they relate to actual incidents of humor simply do not exist. This dissertation study explores aspects of humor production that have yet to be explored within the field of humor studies.

Tacit Knowledge

Tacit knowledge provides theoretical grounding for this study. The term "tacit knowledge" differentiates the knowledge people absorb through everyday experience from the knowledge people gain through explicit instruction

(Sternberg et al., 2000). Tacit knowledge guides behavior but is not readily available for introspection (Sternberg & Horvath, 1999). It includes "knowing what to say to whom, knowing when to say it, and knowing how to say it for maximum effect" (Sternberg et al., 2000, p. xi).

Tacit knowledge is often involved when we behave without consciously thinking about our actions (Castillo, 2002). I propose that humor producers rely on tacit knowledge when interjecting humor. Successful producers do not perform a conscious evaluation of the situation before creating and communicating humor. Rather, they intuitively know from past experiences how to craft a humorous comment, how to adopt an appropriate style, and how to time their funny contributions.

Although research has yet to directly connect humor production with the concept of tacit knowledge, several researchers allude to the association. Martin et al. (2003) write, "We do not assume that . . . functions of humor are necessarily consciously selected or used in a volitional manner" (p. 53). Dewitte and Verguts (2001) point out that "theories of humor production usually provide a system of rules that can, in principle, be used to generate good jokes. . . .It is unlikely, however, that a humorist has explicit knowledge of these rules" (p. 38).

Nevo and Nevo (1983) administered a cartoon captioning exercise to high school students in Israel and instructed them to create captions that were as humorous and funny as possible. Their captions reflected the use of specific techniques such as displacement, representation by the opposite, play on words,

absurdity, and fantasy. Nevo and Nevo (1983) registered their surprise: "subjects applied Freud as if they had read him" (p. 192)! However, when researchers asked students how they constructed their funny captions, the students seemed unaware that they were following any guidelines: "when asked, 'How did you do it?' they could not specify any rules. They responded with vague answers like 'I said what came to my mind,' 'I let go,' and 'I went wild" (p. 192). Apparently, the students relied on tacit knowledge of humor production as they created cartoon captions.

As mentioned in the "humor production" section of this review, Binsted et al.'s (1997) research on the Joke Analysis and Production Engine (JAPE) also suggests a connection between tacit knowledge and humor. The fact that a software program can create original, humorous puns simply by following a defined, mechanical protocol indicates that a set of rules lie beneath the creation of some forms of humorous communication. Linguistic humor research also reveals a set of guidelines that shape humor. For example, Davis (1993) presented a lock-step process for producing humor using monophones (one word, one sound, different meanings), homophones or homonyms (two words, same sound, different meanings), homonoids (two words, similar sound, different meanings), and allophones (two words, shifted sounds, different meanings). Again, if humor can be created based solely on a set of rules, some standard knowledge may guide its production.

Studies of humor development also suggest that children learn to produce humor implicitly, through the context of social play and by watching others create and communicate humor (Martin, 2007). The modeling/reinforcement hypothesis posits that children learn to produce humor by watching their parents. Through observing parents' own humor production, children learn what kind of humor to use, how to use it, and when to use it (Manke, 1998). In a study of college students and elderly women, McGhee (1986) found that people who remembered their same-gender parents as frequent humorists received higher ratings on a measure of current humor initiation. In a study of humor, assertiveness, and activity, Kogan and Block found that "the active and assertive style of behavior found to be associated with humor among children may begin with the parents creating a playful and joking atmosphere when the children are young and most vulnerable to the parents' behaviors" (cited in Lefcourt, 2001, p. 81). Disposition, personality, and cognitive ability appear to influence humor development as well, but environment--what the child learns implicitly from watching others around them--plays an undeniably important role (Bergen, 2007).

An individual's ability to effectively produce humor is likely to depend at least partially on the tacit knowledge he or she has accumulated about humor through life experiences. Studying the subjective experience of the humor producer inevitably involves elucidating the tacit knowledge that leads each participant to produce a specific instance of humor at a particular point in the

conversation. The goal of this study is to explore humor producers' subjective experiences. Stated another way, the goal is to translate participants' *tacit knowledge* about humor production into *explicit knowledge*.

Conclusion

The current dissertation investigates the subjective experience of the spontaneous humor producer. The literature reviewed above indicates that this topic deserves researchers' attention; humor is a ubiquitous form of social communication that functions in a variety of significant ways at the individual, group, and organizational levels. The literature also suggests that the context of workplace meetings was a logical choice; spontaneous humor occurs frequently within the workplace and during meetings. Existing research also sensitized the researcher to the many forms humorous communication may assume, to characteristics of the people who are likely to produce it, and to contextual variables that may influence its production.

While existing research informs the current study, it fails to directly address its central question. Most humor research addresses the functions of humor and/or humor interpretation and appreciation. Of the research that addresses humor production, very little focuses on spontaneous humor or on the experience and/or perspective of the humor producer. The only studies to investigate what takes place internally "in the moment" as an individual produces humor focus on a software program that generates simple puns (Binsted et al., 1997), brain damaged participants completing formal interviews

(Heath & Blonder, 2005), or expert comics creating captions for cartoons (Siegler, 2003). All three studies contribute meaningfully to the literature, but none provide an understanding of the more "everyday" spontaneous humor producer's subjective experience. In addition, none of these studies directly addresses the tacit knowledge on which humor producers must rely when creating humor. This dissertation study fills a clear gap in the humor literature and provides a new understanding of a mode of communication that occurs frequently and uniquely affects a wide range of important outcomes.

Chapter III: Method

The purpose of this study is to explore the subjective experience of the spontaneous humor producer. I used two different methods to accomplish this goal. First, I gathered data by videotaping employee meetings and conducting one-on-one Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) interviews with those individuals who produced humor during the taped meeting session. Second, I analyzed data from the IPR interviews using an emergent, thematic analysis (TA) method. Chapter 3 includes four main sections: (1) Rationale for IPR as a methodological fit for this study; (2) Protocol for *gathering* data via IPR, (3) Rationale for TA as a methodological fit for this study; (4) Protocol for *analyzing* data via TA. Because the IPR method is new to the field of humor studies, I include an extended discussion of its history and evolution as a research method.

Rationale for Methodological Fit: IPR

Norman Kagan originally developed IPR as a method for training and supervising counseling students (Kagan, Krathwohl, & Miller, 1963). IPR involves videotaping individuals while they are relating to each other. Subsequently, the inquirer (who was the researcher in this study) shows the recording to the individuals--alone and/or together--and guides them though the process of evaluating their thoughts, feelings, and intentions during specific portions of the interaction. The inquirer's goal is to help participants translate their intuitive or covert knowledge into explicit language.

Kagan and Kagan (1991) emphasized that the "inquirer role and function .

. . is the heart and soul of IPR. It is the inquirer's expectation that people have encyclopedic knowledge of their interactions that can be brought to awareness that makes IPR the powerful tool it is" (p. 222). Thus, it is the inquirer's job to surface and facilitate examination of the covert activities that take place during social interactions while avoiding leading questions that may bias a participant's responses. The inquirer actively pushes each participant "for greater clarity in describing and understanding specific behaviors" (Kagan, Schauble, Resnikoff, Danish, & Krathwohl, 1969, p. 367). These behaviors "are purposeful . . . as such, they are either carried out deliberately and are conscious or they are automatic in the moment but accessible to awareness when reflected upon" (Levitt & Rennie, 2004, p. 304).

The inquirer's questions focus on internal processes such as: the thoughts and feelings of the participant, the thoughts and feelings the participant believed others were having, the impression the participant wanted to give or not give the others, the images or pictures that were associated with particular feelings, recollections that came to mind of other times and places, the effect of other people's physical appearances, what the participant wanted from others or what the participant thought others wanted of her or him (Dawes, 1999).

The goal of IPR in its original format was two-fold--to develop the helping relationship skills of the counselor trainee and to accelerate client growth (Spivack, 1974). By participating in IPR, the counselor trainee learns how the client interpreted and internalized the trainee's comments and behaviors, thus

providing feedback about how the trainee may alter behavior in order to become a more effective counselor. Similarly, the client is able to examine the dynamics underlying his or her decisions and contributions during the therapy session, gaining insight into maladaptive reactions and behaviors that may be modified.

As Spivack (1974) explained, "the self-confrontive nature, immediacy, and focused examination of a videotape of a previously held interaction affords the opportunity for close scrutiny and examination of intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics, increased awareness, and personal growth for the person (or persons) engaged in this process" (p. 235). Many studies of IPR as a counselor training method have found that completing the IPR process leads to successful outcomes for both trainees and clients (Elliott, 1986; Hartson & Kunce, 1973; Kagan & Kagan, 1997; Kagan, 1980; Kingdon, 1975; Wiseman, 1992).

IPR as a research method. Since its initial inception as method of counselor supervision, IPR has been modified for use as a research method (Elliott, 1986), and researchers have used it to study a wide range of topics. Typically, an IPR researcher investigates a broad topic such as the client's subjective experience of therapy (Rennie, 1992). Other topics that researchers have studied via IPR include: therapists' reflections during a therapy session (Rober, Elliot, Buysse, Loots, & DeCorte, 2008), the rehabilitation processes of brain-injured patients (Helffenstein & Wechsler, 1982), patrons' assessments of an innovative museum exhibition (George & Stevenson, 1991), elementary students' thought processes during mathematical problem solving (Usnick &

Brown, 1992), examiners' decision-making processes during administration of the Medical Research Council General Practitioner oral exam (Yaphe & Street, 2003), and behavioral intentions of female ice hockey players (Shapcott, Bloom, & Loughead, 2007). Researchers use IPR to gain a sense of the landscape of a broad experience. During the IPR interview, the researcher/ inquirer instructs the participant to stop the videotape *at any moment that seems significant*. Then, the inquirer poses questions about each moment, helping the participant translate his or her intuitive or covert knowledge into explicit language.

In contrast, some IPR researchers focus on narrower topics: specific incidents during an interaction such as significant change events in psychotherapy (Elliot, 1984) problematic client reactions (Watson & Rennie, 1994; Wiseman, 1992), and aggressive hostage negotiation skills (Charles, 2007). In these studies, researchers adopt a modified version of IPR. The researcher, research team, or the participant views the videotape before the IPR interview, isolating footage in which the behavior of interest occurs. Then, the inquirer reviews the isolated footage with the participant, posing IPR interview questions about each occurrence of the behavior of interest. The current study utilized this modified version of IPR to study instances of spontaneous humor production.

When used as a research method, researchers typically pair IPR with another qualitative method such as grounded theory (Levitt, 2001; Rennie, 2001; Rober et al., 2008; Watson & Rennie, 1994), discourse analysis (Charles, 2007), or content analysis (Elliott, 1986; Shapcott et al., 2007; Yaphe & Street, 2003) to

analyze data produced via the IPR inquiry process. I analyzed data from the IPR interviews using thematic analysis and discuss this method in detail later in this chapter.

Strengths of IPR as a method for examining humor production. The IPR method is a logical fit for this study for several reasons.

IPR produces data about subjective experience. Most research using IPR focuses on counseling or psychotherapeutic exchanges. Levitt and Rennie (2004) predicted that data gathered through IPR will fill a significant gap in narrative research on psychotherapy. Most studies in this area involve researchers analyzing transcripts of therapy sessions and interpreting clients' stories from the researchers' perspectives. A disadvantage of such studies is "the absence of the clients' and therapists' self-reflections on their experiences of narrative communication" (p. 300).

Levitt and Rennie's (2004) research revealed that many nuances of counselor and client communication are missed and misunderstandings of intentions occur when narrative research in psychotherapy depends solely on external discourse analysis. Their work "illustrates the unpredictability that can exist in judging the internal experiences of either the therapist or the client on the basis of discourse alone" (p. 308). Thus, IPR provides the phenomenological, subjective data that are missing in many studies of narrative in psychotherapy.

Parallels exist between narrative research on therapy sessions and the limited research on spontaneous humor in conversation. Existing studies on

spontaneous humor in conversation involve researchers analyzing transcripts and drawing conclusions about humor producers' intentions, the meaning of humorous comments, and the functions of humorous interjections without the benefit of input from participants in the interactions (Hatch, 1997; Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993; Hay, 2000; Holmes, 2000, 2006, 2007; Holmes & Marra, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2006; Lehrer, 1983; Schnurr et al., 2007; Schnurr, 2008; Tannen, 1984; Yedes, 1996). None of these scholars claims to represent participants' perspectives, so this absence of first person reports is not a weakness of the studies themselves. Rather, it indicates a gap in humor research that may be filled by data gathered through IPR interviews with humor producers.

IPR research that produces rich and useful data about internal experience extends beyond the fields of psychology and counseling. George and Stevenson (1991) used IPR to gain direct insight into the responses and learning processes of visitors to an exhibition at the Discovery Room in the Royal Museums of Scotland. They found IPR to be a valuable source of qualitative data and were able to understand "what had excited, mystified, or thrilled the visitor, and why, as well as what people experienced as baffling, alien, boring, or over-familiar. Here was the raw data of their experience--vivid, immediate, even funny or moving at times" (p. 208). Interestingly, George and Stevenson also gathered feedback via more traditional methods. None of the traditional methods provided data as helpful as the IPR-generated data.

Shapcott et al. (2007) conducted a study investigating the behavioral

intentions of collegiate female hockey players involved in aggressive or assertive interactions during a game. Through the IPR process, they were able to gather abundant and robust explanations of the hockey players' internal experiences. Such encounters had not been tapped by previous studies using more traditional research methods.

In 1975, after eleven years of actively developing IPR, Kagan concluded that data emerging from the IPR process "was fantastic. . . .The amount of rapid acceleration of participant awareness, owning up to feelings, self-analysis and critique, insights and motivation to improve, suggested immediately that the process of stimulated recall using videotape . . . was a powerful new educational and research tool" (p. 75). Furthermore, Kagan and Kagan (1991) found that IPR revealed aspects of interaction that would not have emerged otherwise: "People have an uncanny awareness of each other's most subtle emotions . . . that was not apparent under ordinary circumstances but was acknowledged and described during IPR sessions" (p. 222). The research reviewed above played a significant role in guiding me toward IPR as a method in the current study. Clearly, it had the potential to produce data that would address a gap in the humor literature.

IPR fits the state of research on humor production. Edmonson and McManus (2007) proposed criteria for evaluating methodological fit in field research. They suggested that achieving "methodological fit depends on the state of relevant theory at the time the research is designed and executed" (p. 1158). They identified three general states of prior theory and research--nascent,

intermediate, and mature--and recommended specific methods that are likely to be a fit for each state:

> As an area of theory becomes more mature with greater consensus among researchers, most important contributions take the form of carefully specified theoretical models and quantitative tests. Conversely, the less that is known about a phenomenon in the organizational literature, the more likely exploratory qualitative research will be a fruitful strategy. In the middle, a mix of qualitative and quantitative data leverages both approaches to develop new constructs and powerfully demonstrate the plausibility of new relationships. (p. 1177)

The field of humor studies includes several well-developed areas of research such as the social functions of humor and the semantics of humor, but relatively little research focuses explicitly on the humor producer or the humor production process itself. Therefore, the state of prior theory and research on humor production is nascent or, at most, intermediate. Based on Edmonson and McManus' (2007) framework, an exploratory, qualitative method like IPR is likely to be the best fit for a study of humor producers.

IPR aligns with the study's epistemology. The IPR method aligns with this phenomenologically-oriented constructivist study. A constructivist researcher believes that "human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 30). The goal of this study is to understand how participants construct or experience humor production. IPR is grounded in Kagan's proposition that people are constantly interpreting the social situation around them in order to make meaning of it: "it is central to Kagan's theory that

when we interact with others much more goes on than we can deal with consciously at the time" (Clarke, 1997, p. 95). The goal of IPR is to reveal the thoughts, feelings, and intentions that take place "below the radar" during interactions; the very premise of IPR reflects a contructivist view of the world.

In addition, the approach to this study is phenomenological. Phenomenological studies "focus on exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness . . . how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). The protocol of the IPR method is inherently phenomenological. The inquirer positions himself or herself as a neutral, non-directive questioner whose goal is to understand the participant's experience from his or her unique perspective.

IPR enhances recall. IPR leads to a thorough account of the thoughts and feelings that have occurred during an interaction. Replaying the videotape of an interaction "provides highly reliable cues through auditory and visual sensory channels so memory details which are not elicited by one set of cues may be accessed by the other" (Dawes, 1999, p. 204). Carpenter (cited in Shotter, 1983) explains that people who view themselves through the detachment of a third person perspective inevitably experience a shift in self-knowledge; "they can become objects of evaluation, etc., for themselves in a way quite impossible for them before" (p. 207).

Also, increasing the variety of cues generally increases the number of

details recalled (Chandler & Fisher, 1996), and IPR presents participants with many of the cues that were present when they initiated humor. IPR also improves the temporal accuracy of participants' recollections because videotapes present interactions in the same order in which they actually occurred. Dawes (1999) summarizes IPR's ability to enhance memory by explaining that "the conditions which exist in complex social situations--situations in which large amounts of ambiguous information compete for attention from more sources than we can attend to--are the very conditions which produce . . . memory problems. . . .It is important to consider the use of methods and techniques which minimize these errors. Interpersonal Process Recall is one such technique" (p. 203).

IPR is a better fit for this study than other available methods. I explored the possibility of investigating my research question via other methods such as observational, ethnographic, survey, and traditional interview methods. None shares IPR's unique combination of strengths – natural alignment with the study's epistemological grounding, video presentation that enhances recall, and a protocol for gathering data that enables the researcher to stay as close as possible to the participant's lived experience. I also examined several video-assisted methods that did not seem to fit my study as well as IPR:

- Stimulated Recall (Bloom, 1954; Calderhead, 1981; Omodei, McLennan, & Wearing, 2005)

- Video Cuing Stimulated Recall Interview (VCSRI) (Wilcox & Trudel, 1998)
- Self-Confrontation Interviews (vonCranach & Harre, 1982; Macquet, 2009)
- Course-of-Action Methodology (Theureau, 1992; cited in Macquet, 2009)
- Retrospective Reports (Varela & Shear, 1999)
- Retrospective Thinking Aloud (Kommer & Bastine, 1982; Wagner & Weidle, 1982)
- Videotape Reconstruction (Meichenbaum & Butler, 1979)
- Videotape Inquiry (Knudson, Sommers & Golding, 1980)
- Playback (Fanshel & Moss, 1971)
- Videotape-Assisted Recall (Young, 1985)

Of these video-assisted recall methods, Stimulated Recall (Bloom, 1954; Calderhead, 1981; Omodei et al., 2005) and VCSRI (Wilcox & Trudel, 1998) are perhaps the most recognized within the social sciences. Stimulated Recall refers to a variety of techniques and does not imply a specific protocol or theoretical base. Researchers who identify their method as Stimulated Recall adhere to a wide range of methodological procedures (for example, Omodei et al., 2005). As a relatively new researcher, the established yet flexible structure of IPR was more attractive to me than the relatively undefined protocol of Stimulated Recall.

In addition, the majority of Stimulated Recall research focuses exclusively on the thought processes and decision-making of participants (mainly those of teachers and students in educational settings). While I hoped that my research would reveal some of the humor producer's thought and decision processes, I sought to understand additional qualities of his or her experience such as physical and emotional responses. As I have already indicated, Kagan (1975, 1980) designed IPR to reveal a comprehensive picture of participants' subjective experiences, and research indicates that the method does so successfully.

Like Stimulated Recall, researchers have utilized VCSRI to examine a narrow range of experience – the connection between stated beliefs and subsequent action. Typically, a VCSRI researcher interviews participants about a certain aspect of their beliefs *before* videotaping an event. The researcher then compares this account with actual behavior that takes place during a videotaped event. This protocol does not align with my research goals. I did not wish to compare participants' beliefs about humor before and after humor initiation. I also wanted to avoid sensitizing participants to my interest in humor. Such disclosure would likely affect their subsequent use of and response to humor.

Potential limitations of IPR. Although a thorough comparison of IPR to other available methods revealed IPR as the most logical fit for the current study, limitations exist.

Studying subjective experience. Some researchers argue that it is impossible for people to access their own cognitive and emotional processes. Thus, in their

opinion, participants' reports of their internal experiences do not necessarily reflect those processes at all (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). It follows that research that relies on such descriptions is deeply flawed. Other researchers remain steadfast in their belief that many people are capable of accessing their subjective experiences. Elliott (1986) states that "my experience with IPR suggests that clients are much more aware of their subtle defensive processes and momentary psychological states than most observers or therapists believe" (p. 519).

In addition, research that casts doubt on participants' ability to recall the subjective aspects of lived experience employs think-aloud and interview methods as opposed to video-assisted methods (for example, Bem & McConnell, 1970; Goethals & Reckman, 1973; Latane & Darley, 1970; Valins & Ray, 1967; Wilson, 1975). In concurrent think-aloud processes, the researcher interrupts the participant's flow of thought by stopping him or her for questioning in the middle of a behavior event. This practice may cause a participant's "thought processes [to] take directions different from those they would have taken had the subject been left on his or her own" (van Someren, Barnard, & Sandberg, 1994). Thus, concurrent think-aloud methods may not provide accurate or realistic accounts of a participant's typical internal dialogue.

In retrospective think-aloud processes (and in retrospective interview protocols as well), participants must concentrate simultaneously on (1) remembering the event or behavior of interest to the interviewer, (2) recalling his or her subjective experience of that event, and (3) managing the interaction with

the interviewer. The energy required to perform all of these functions at the same time may make it difficult for the participant to fully access past internal experiences and/or to verbalize such memories accurately.

Participants in IPR interviews, on the other hand, have the benefit of visual and audio cues that take them back to the actual moments when they participated in a specific behavior. They do not have to dedicate mental energy to conjuring these cues in their minds. In addition, IPR participants indicate that watching themselves on video allows them to re-experience the same psychological and physical sensations that arose in that moment. Critics who suggest that participants are unable to access or describe internal states have not considered the power of video-assisted techniques (Bem & McConnell, 1970; Goethals & Reckman, 1973; Latane & Darley, 1970; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Valins & Ray, 1967; Wilson, 1975). While IPR participants do have to focus on their interaction with the inquirer (researcher) while verbalizing their subjective experiences of a past event, it is likely that IPR enables them to access such internal processes more deeply and/or more accurately than participants in think-aloud and retrospective interview studies.

Feedback from participants indicates that IPR enabled them to access much of what they experienced when producing humor. Shawn's statement below was typical of participant feedback:

> Shawn: You know, had I not been able to watch the video, um, and you just asked me those questions I probably wouldn't have remembered, you know, several of the things--like Grey looking at me a couple times . . . You know, that just was kind of an in-the-moment thing that I wouldn't

have particularly recalled.

Lisa: So, the video did help?

Shawn: Oh, *absolutely.*

Distinguishing recall from reconstruction. One possible criticism of IPR – somewhat similar to the criticism just discussed--is that participants may construct (as opposed to recall) subjective experiences as they watch themselves on video. This criticism is valid to some degree. Dawes (1999) writes, "IPR can only be applied to 'reflection on action' or to 'reflection on reflection on action'" (p. 207). IPR is likely to minimize (but not eradicate) the amount of "reflection on reflection on action." Rennie (1992) finds that "if they [participants] are asked to make the discrimination, they can usually distinguish between when they are recalling and when they are constructing in light of the inquiry"(p. 226) – *usually*, but not *always*.

In addition, participants inevitably co-construct their interpretations of a videotaped interaction as they view and discuss it with the inquirer. Although the inquirer may sincerely attempt to maintain a neutral stance while questioning the participant, the IPR interview process is itself an interpersonal interaction. The presence of the inquirer and his or her contributions to the interaction affect a participant's responses.

The idea that IPR may not produce a "pure" report of the participant's experience of humor production does not diminish the usefulness of the method. IPR is likely to provide richer, more accurate results than other available

methods. Barring the discovery of a new technology that can directly access an individual's internal thoughts, feelings, and intentions, researchers seek data that are as "unpolluted" as possible. Despite the inevitability of construction during IPR interviews, participants' comments suggest that they often felt that they were recalling the experience of producing humor quite clearly. After presenting a clip of the participant producing humor, I always offered to replay the clip before asking any questions. Usually, the participant stopped me from doing so, stating that they remembered the incident clearly and were ready to get started with the interview. My exchange with Marc below was typical:

Lisa: Alright, I'm gonna play it again and I'll stop right after your…

Marc: No, I know exactly what I was thinking.

Participant omission. A researcher using IPR assumes that participants are willing and able to reveal their experiences to the researcher. Kihlstrom, Mulvaney, Tobias, and Tobis (2000) warn that "one must carefully distinguish between the subjects' failure to consciously feel a particular emotion and their willingness to report what they feel to an experimenter" (p. 61). Participants may fail to share all aspects of their recollections for several reasons. First, participants may lack the self-awareness necessary to report their experiences (Cooper, 2005). Second, participants may be reluctant to admit when they have nothing to say about their experience (Elliott, 1986). Third, they may avoid sharing information they find unflattering about themselves (Cooper, 2005). Fourth, "people think in images as well as words, and images may not be easy to

express in words" (Rennie, 2001, p. 84). Finally, participants may assume that a particular aspect of their experience is irrelevant to the study (Rober et al., 2008).

Following IPR interviews with participants (therapists) Rober and his colleagues (2008) found that several of them had not talked about personal thoughts that had occurred during the videotaped sessions – things they needed to do, the attractiveness of the client, etc. The research team concluded, "what we have actually studied is not the therapists' inner conversations but rather the inner conversations that the participating therapists were willing to talk about in the given context" (p. 55). IPR is not a perfect recording of participants' reflections.

Some instances of participant omission probably occurred in the current study. As I discuss in the protocol section of this chapter, I attempted to minimize the frequency of omissions by creating a comfortable, non-judgmental atmosphere. Also, the script I read to participants before beginning the IPR interview encouraged them (1) to share all recollections they experienced while watching the videotape and (2) to focus on their recall of their experience, not an explanation for their behavior that they created during the interview. I present the full text of this introductory script later in this chapter.

Video effects. A video camera in the room is hard to ignore, and participants' awareness of being videotaped probably affected interactions during the meeting. "Natural field observations . . . with a camera can have an intrusive effect on the persons who are observed and may change their

behavior," writes Bottorff (1994, p. 250). Wiemann (1981) suggests "the potential reactivity of knowledge of being videotaped is particularly crucial in studies that deal with 'everyday' social interaction" (p. 302). A study of spontaneous humor during group interaction certainly falls into this category.

Participants may react to the camera by changing their behavior--not acting as they would if the camera were not present--in a number of ways:

- The participant may be nervous and, thus, engage in nervous habits or have trouble focusing on the situation being filmed (Latvala, Vuokila-Oikkonen, & Janhonen, 2000).
- The participant may put on his or her "best behavior," trying to act in a way that will satisfy the researcher (Wiemann, 1981).
- The participant may engage in intense self-monitoring that prevents him or her from engaging naturally in social interaction (Bottorff, 1994).

I attempted to prevent these video effects as much as possible by adopting the recommendations of researchers who are experienced in video-assisted methods:

- When recruiting participants, I explained the rationale for using a video-assisted method and shared the protocol for the data collection process with them (Bottorff, 1994).
- I reassured participants that videotaped data will remain confidential (Bottorff, 1994).

- I spent time with participants before taping to develop trust and rapport with them (Bottorff, 1994; Latvala et al., 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morse & Field, 1995), and
- I placed the camera in as inconspicuous a spot as possible (Ratcliff, 2003).

In addition, several studies indicate that any change in behavior due to the presence of a video camera diminishes over time as participants become used to the camera (Bottorff, 1994; Grimshaw, 1982; Morse & Field, 1995). Although it is likely that some video effects occurred, feedback from participants indicated that they got used to having the camera in the room. Katie, Nancy, and Andy's comments (excerpted from their individual interviews) were typical:

> Katie: I didn't even really think about it except right at the beginning.
>
> Nancy: Yeah, after the meeting got started I just quit thinking about it.
>
> Andy: For the first two minutes, you're kind of aware that it's there, but at least I was able to kind of not, not have it bother me.

Summary: Methodological Fit of IPR. IPR was an appropriate method for this study given the nascent state of research on humor production. It aligns naturally with this phenomenologically-oriented, constructivist study, and it enhances participant recall. In addition, I am clear about the nature of the data IPR interviews generated; participant responses to IPR interview questions may include both recall and construction of instances of humor production. However, based on feedback from participants, the research design minimized contamination of the data, participant omission and video effects. Overall, IPR

produced high-quality data about the subjective experiences of spontaneous humor producers.

Protocol for Gathering Data via IPR

Recruit participants. The participant sample for this study was purposive, meaning I strategically selected information-rich cases that were likely to illuminate this study's research question (Patton, 2002). Again, the research question in this study is: What is the subjective experience of the spontaneous humor producer? To my knowledge, this study is the first attempt to understand humor production from the viewpoint of the person initiating humor. Thus, I sought a maximum variation sample that would enable me to explore a wide range of producers' possible experiences. The logic of a maximum variation sample is that "any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon" (Patton, 2002, p. 234). In addition, this type of sample allowed me to gather detailed descriptions of each producer's experience that reveal the uniqueness of his or her perspective.

While the participants in this study were the individuals who produced humor during an organizational meeting, I initially recruited groups or teams who had a scheduled meeting they would allow me to videotape. In hopes of obtaining a diverse sample, I sought:

- groups from non-profit, not-for-profit, and for-profit organizations,

- long and short-term groups,
- groups that included only peers and groups that included participants from a variety of hierarchical positions, and
- groups that were demographically diverse (relative to ethnic groups, ages, and genders) and groups that were not demographically diverse.

From my professional work as a consultant and my personal involvement in the community, I have a number of contacts within Birmingham organizations. I started recruiting participants by calling upon these contacts and asking them to identify groups that might be willing to participate. I recruited groups from previous client organizations (a public utility and a commercial real estate company) but avoided groups that include individuals I know well. I was concerned that having a close relationship with a participant might influence the nature of the IPR interview and/or my analysis of the data itself.

When approaching a potential participant group (target group), my first contact was with the manager who supervises the group--the individual with ultimate authority to approve employees' participation in the study. In all but one case (the commercial real estate company), my initial contact was a member of the target group. When speaking with the Vice-President who served as my contact at the commercial real estate company, I shared the details and logistics of the study, including the specific research question. I asked that she avoid disclosing to group members that the focus of the study was humor. I was

concerned that if participants knew that I was looking for humor incidents, they might modify their behavior accordingly. For example, they could concoct humorous comments to interject during the meeting, preventing me from capturing truly spontaneous humor; or they might avoid interjecting humor at all for fear of being analyzed.

When dealing with all other initial recruiting contacts who where members of the target groups, I explained the details of the study, describing the research question accurately but more generally: I am interested in investigating specific interpersonal dynamics that take place during group meetings in organizations. In my conversation with the manager, I also described the potential benefits to those who take part in the study:

- Exposure to the process of academic research;
- The opportunity to contribute to research that may benefit other employees and organizations; and
- Enhanced understanding of their own internal, subjective experiences of interactions during a group meeting (for those who participate in an IPR interview).

I explained the commitments necessary to participate in the study as well: The group will allow me to attend a portion of a group meeting prior to the meeting I videotape (the target meeting) and agree to let me observe and videotape one group meeting. Each group member must be available for a 30-45 minute individual interview--that will be audio taped--one or two days after the

target meeting. Because it was impossible to predict who would initiate humor during the meeting, every member of the team had to have potential availability for a subsequent interview.

I emphasized my commitment to ensuring the confidentiality of data. If the manager was comfortable moving to the next step in the research process, s/he and I coordinated a time for me to come and meet with the team in person – to explain the study and to answer any questions they may have. I also requested the manager's permission to contact group members directly by e-mail prior to this meeting. I asked that the manager let the group know he or she had given me permission to contact them via e-mail. I asked the manager to refrain from encouraging the group to participate; it was important that the invitation to participate comes from me. Each member of the group had to agree to participate in the study freely, with no perception of pressure or coercion from the manager.

I then sent a joint e-mail message to all group members to introduce myself and to provide a general explanation of my study. The message reviewed the benefits of participation and clarified the commitments I was asking each member to make. It also announced the date and time of the preliminary meeting I planned to attend in order to meet the team and provide them the opportunity to ask questions about the study. Several researchers suggest that building rapport with participants before videotaping them may reduce participant reactivity to the video camera (Latvala et al., 2000; Morse & Field, 1995; Lincoln

& Guba, 1985). I provided team members with my contact information and invited them to contact me before or after the preliminary meeting with any questions.

At this point in the process, the manager of one team with which I was in discussion contacted me to say that her team did not want to participate in the study. Team members had concerns about being videotaped and had communicated these concerns directly to the manager. This team was dropped from the study. Only one participant, a member of the lead teacher group at the private elementary school contacted me directly prior to a preliminary meeting. She indicated that she was happy to participate in the videotaped meeting but did not want to be included in a subsequent one-on-one interview. I told her that I was happy to honor this request and that I would not tell anyone that she had contacted me. This participant ended up being sick the day of the videotaped meeting, so the issue became moot.

Preliminary meetings with each group took place a week to two weeks prior to videotaping. All potential participant teams were welcoming and friendly; some posed more questions about the study than others. Preliminary meetings lasted approximately 20 minutes each and in all but two cases (the commercial real estate group and the legal department at a public utility) took place during an already scheduled staff meeting. At the end of the preliminary meeting, I indicated my intention to call or e-mail each group member to answer any questions he or she may have about the study (King, 2005). I conducted

these follow-up contacts one or two days after the preliminary meeting.

During these interactions, I offered each potential participant the opportunity to privately accept or decline participation. All members of the group had to agree to participate in order to take part in the study. I promised that if a group member declined the invitation to participate, I would not disclose that person's name to the rest of the group. At this point in the process, an individual from one of the potential participant groups contacted me and indicated that he did not want to participate in the study. Thus, this group was dropped from the study. I sent a message to the group thanking them for their initial interest and explaining that the group did not satisfy the criteria for this particular study.

I repeated the recruitment process described above until I had identified five groups that were willing to participate. I began gathering data from groups that accepted my invitation to participate while concurrently recruiting additional groups. The initial goal to recruit five groups was partially based on three previous IPR studies that are structured similarly to the current study. These studies also report the number of participants and incidents examined. (I describe the process of identifying humor incidents for this study in detail later in this chapter.) In the current study and the three studies considered here, the researcher or research team:

- Pre-selected segments of video that captured a specific behavior of interest,

- Narrowed the pool of incidents to those that provided diverse examples of the behavior of interest,
- Completed individual IPR interviews (as opposed to group interviews), and
- Sought to understand participants' subjective experiences of that behavior.

Elliot (1984) studied significant change events in psychotherapy. He focused on 4 clients, each providing one incident for analysis. Charles (2007) sought to understand the interactional communication of crisis negotiators and conducted IPR interviews with 4 negotiators who provided a total of 5 incidents. Watson and Rennie (1994) investigated significant moments during clients' problematic reactions during a therapy session. Their sample included 8 clients who contributed 18 total incidents (3 incidents per client).

Unfortunately, only one study of humor in organizational meetings reports the frequency at which humor occurred, so it was difficult to predict how many humor incidents were likely to arise within a given period of time. Holmes and Marra (2002a) studied humor in meetings at two New Zealand organizations. They reviewed 875 minutes of audiotape and identified 217 instances of humor--approximately .25 instances of humor per minute. At the rate of .25 incidents per minute, I predicted that five one-hour (approximately) meetings would yield around 75 humor incidents. Since I would be utilizing a maximum of two incidents per participant, I reasoned that the number of usable

incidents was likely to be lower than 75. However, it seemed logical to predict that five groups would produce at least 20 unique incidents.

Thus, my initial goal was to gather 20 incidents from 20 different participants, two more than Watson and Rennie (1994). I ended up gathering 66 incidents of humor from 26 different participants, significantly exceeding this goal. I describe the participant pool in detail in Chapter 4.

Prepare for target meeting. Prior to each target meeting, I requested information about each group member's position both within the organization and relative to each other. I will familiarized myself with the organization--its culture, mission, history, structure, and current projects (Caldwell & Atwal, 2005; Yedes, 1996). Understanding a bit about the organization prior to the target meeting allowed me to adjust my personal style accordingly and helped me to understand the content of the meetings I videotaped.

Attend target meeting. *Position the video camera.* I arrived at the meeting site early, allowing time to set up the video camera and back-up digital audio recorder before participants arrived. To create a video that would be an effective recall stimulant to any participant who interjects humor into the conversation, I focused the camera broadly, encompassing an image of all group members. The downside to this choice is that memory cues are maximized when the camera is focused on whatever the participant sees during the interaction. However, taping from multiple perspectives simultaneously would require the use of several cameras, and practical constraints required me to rely on a single video

camera. Dawes (1999) indicates that a video image that includes all participants is sufficient; "even a relatively broad focus provides enough cues to aid recall" (p. 213). Marsh (1983) echoes this advice, encouraging the researcher to record as simply and unselectively as possible; otherwise, "the camera can become a subtle way of keeping control in the hands of the inquirer and not the learner" (p. 122).

Reiterate the purpose of the study. Before starting the video camera, I reminded participants about the purpose and logistics of the study using the following bullet points as a guide:

- The purpose of the study is to investigate specific interpersonal dynamics during group meetings in organizations.
- I will videotape and observe this group meeting, and I have placed a digital tape recorder in the middle of the table as backup to the audio on my video camera.
- I will be taking notes during the meeting as I observe.
- Following this meeting, I will contact those individuals who exhibited behaviors that are evidence of the interpersonal dynamics in which I'm interested.
- I will request a 30-45 minute private interview with each individual to take place tomorrow or the following day. At this meeting, the individual and I will review video clips of the meeting together. I will audiotape this meeting.
- All data from this study will be kept in the strictest of confidence. I

will not share video footage or data from the study with anyone other than my research team (coders(s), transcriptionist, and dissertation committee). I will change all participants' names and the name of the organization when I report my findings.

Invite participants to complete Informed Consent document. To formalize my commitment to maintaining the confidentiality of data and to ensure that all group members fully understood that their participation was voluntary, I asked them to complete the informed consent document (Appendix A). Three key potential ethical issues existed in this study. First, I was concerned that participants might feel pressure from their manager or peers to take part in the study. I attempted to prevent such pressures by directly inviting group members to participate (rather than asking the manager to do so) and by contacting each person individually to privately inquire about his or her willingness to take part. Nevertheless, a participant might still perceive that pressure exists. The informed consent document, therefore, indicated that the participant could withdraw from the study at any time. It also encouraged those who were at all uncomfortable to withdraw before videotaping begins. The form explained that if individuals withdrew from the study after videotaping was complete, they would not be obligated to complete an IPR interview. I would make every effort to purge images and voice recordings that included them. However, because I would be capturing a wide shot of the entire group when

videotaping, their images and/or voices would be present in the background of the video clips I presented to group members who completed an IPR interview.

Second, I recognized that participants might worry that I would report about their behavior or performance to others in the organization. This issue was likely to be particularly pertinent to groups that resided within one of my previous client organizations. In my role as an organizational consultant, I typically work with high-level managers or leaders, and participants were likely to be aware that I have access to these individuals. I attempted to steer clear of situations in which this concern was likely to arise by working only with groups that did not include anyone I knew well. Also, in each communication I have with participants I reiterated that no one in their organization, including the manager who gave permission for the group to participate, would have access to data from the study. Only my research team would have access to videotapes and data. I repeated this commitment in the informed consent document.

Third, I worried that participants might feel uncomfortable knowing that videotaped footage of them would exist in perpetuity. My efforts prior to the target meeting – disclosing via my initial contact with the group that I intended to videotape a meeting, contacting each participant to answer any questions he or she may have, attending a meeting prior to the target meeting to review the purpose and logistics of the study – allowed individuals who were uncomfortable with videotaping to select out of the study. In addition, the informed consent document explained that all data from the study would be

confidential, including participant names and the name of their organization. It also assured participants that if I desire to use videotape footage or data that may reveal their identities in future work, I will obtain their permission before doing so on a case by case basis. Again, participants who became uncomfortable could withdraw from the study; but if they withdrew after videotaping was complete, their images and/or voices were likely to be present in the background of video clips. No participants opted out of the study after signing the informed consent document.

Gather demographic information. Before each target meeting began, I asked participants to fill out a short demographic information sheet (Appendix B). The sheet requested each participant's job title, contact information, gender, age, ethnicity, and tenure at the organization. Also, based on a request from one of the participant groups, I provided participants the opportunity to choose their own code names. I provide a summary of participants' demographic data at the beginning of Chapter 4.

Start video camera and gather team information. As soon as I started the video camera (and back-up digital recorder) I will asked participants to answer two questions about their group:

- How long have you been working together as an established group?
- What is the purpose of your work together?

This information assisted in my data analysis while also allowing the group to get used to the idea of being videotaped before they officially began the meeting.

Maintain researcher role. Smith, McPhail, and Pickens (1975) studied the relative reactivity of observation methods and observer proximity and found that the closer the researcher and video camera were to the participant, the greater that participant's reactivity. Therefore, I sat apart from the group and away from the video camera, attempting to be as non-intrusive as possible. Ratcliff (2003) recommends taking notes to document the camera location, names (or code names) of participants, contextual detail, key events, time and length of events, and personal reactions. I took notes describing the context of the meeting: each participant's position at the table, the location of the meeting, the atmosphere, and anything unusual about the environment (i.e. temperature, noise, comments about specific stressors that currently exist within the organization, etc.). I also took notes that made editing video footage easier, noting instances of humor and when they occurred in the conversation.

While I was a bit concerned that my note taking would make participants self-conscious initially, my past experience with observing groups indicated they would habituate to my presence after a few minutes. While some participants indicated that they noticed my presence during the meeting, most--like Len below--indicated that my presence was not disruptive:

> Len: I lost track of you being there. I did not sense you being there. A couple times I would see you in the corner, but it wasn't *bothering* me.

Select humor incidents. After viewing a videotape of each meeting, I isolated instances of humor and created segments of video that included at least

30 seconds of footage prior to an individual's initiation of humor (Shapcott et al., 2007) and 30 seconds following the incident. Several researchers have used a similar modified version of IPR (Charles, 2007; Dowd, 1977; Elliot, 1984; Levitt, 2001; Shapcott et al., 2007; Watson & Rennie, 1994; Wiseman, 1992). For example, Levitt (2001) isolated segments of videotaped therapy sessions that included a "silence," which she identified defined as a period of no sound lasting at least 3 seconds in duration. She did not include *all* silences from a session in IPR interviews; rather, in order to obtain as broad a spectrum of silence experiences as possible, she selected those incidents that seemed to be most complex, unusual, or puzzling, in relation to pauses already examined.

Similarly, I identified segments of video that included humor, choosing up to six unique humor incidents per participant. Most participants produced between one and three incidents. Only one participant (Kathy) interjected six unique humor incidents. Including up to six incidents per participant increased my opportunity to obtain a wide range of incidents for examination.

Criteria for identifying humor incidents. Humor is a spontaneous and intentional verbal or nonverbal instance of communication that any of the interacting parties perceives as amusing or comical. My goal was to identify humor incidents that align with this definition. Scholars who study humor in conversation generally apply personal and professional judgment to identify humor incidents (Fine, 1984; Fine & DeSoucey, 2005; Hatch, 1997; Hatch & Erlich, 1993; Hay, 2000; Holmes, 2000; Tannen, 1984). Holmes (2000) even refers to the

researcher's (or analyst's) role in defining humor; "instances of humour included in this analysis are utterances which are identified by the analyst . . . as intended by the speaker(s) to be amusing and perceived to be amusing by at least some participants" (p. 161). In her study of spontaneous humor among a group of friends at Thanksgiving dinner, Tannen (1984) identified statements as humorous or ironic "if they seemed not to be meant literally and seemed intended to amuse" (p. 164). Similarly, a graduate student at Duquesne University who used the IPR method to examine humor in psychotherapy sessions, selected humor incidents based on his personal judgment (J. Gregson, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

In addition to relying on my perception of humor to identify incidents, I listened for voice and speech patterns that tend to vary with the initiation of humor. According to Tannen (1984), nasalization, slow rates of speech, and/or exaggerated enunciation often signal an ironic statement. (Although irony and humor are different concepts by definition, Tannen uses the terms interchangeably in her study.) Holmes (2000) suggests that researchers trying to identify humor incidents may watch and listen for the "use of 'smile voice' and similar paralinguistic or prosodic clues [that] can provide an empirical basis for judgments of speakers' intentions" (p. 163). Yedes (1996) notes that "lexical exaggeration and contrastiveness [*sic*]" (p. 421) often signal a humorous or teasing comment.

Laughter following a comment or behavior is another potential sign of

humor. It is likely to be an especially important marker for nonverbal humor since the linguistic cues that signal verbal humor are not available in such cases. As noted in Chapter 2, however, laughter is not a perfect marker for the existence of humor because it often occurs in situations that are devoid of humor (Chapman & Foot, 1976). Thus, I interpreted laughter as one possible sign of humor but used additional indicators such as my own perceptions and changes in participants' vocal or behavioral patterns to identify humor incidents.

Even with this arsenal of cues, I erroneously identified one incident in which the speaker did not intend to be humorous. I did not include this instance in my data analysis. I have no way of knowing if I overlooked occurrences of humor. As this is an exploratory study about the humor producer's experience and not an exhaustive investigation of every possible instance of humor initiation, such mistakes should not affect my analysis significantly.

Complete the IPR interview process. I contacted individuals who produced humor during the meeting several hours after videotaping was complete to schedule an IPR interview. Previous researchers have conducted IPR interviews at varying intervals following videotaping the target interaction. Rober et al. (2008) and Rennie (1992) completed IPR interviews immediately following taped therapy sessions, but Marsh (1983) reports that "because each recall session was over 2 hours long, they were completed over a period of days following the session" (p. 123). My goal was to conduct the IPR interview as quickly as possible after the target meeting (Elliott, 1986), and all but one IPR

interview took place within 48 hours of the videotaped meeting.

Start the audio recorder and debrief the participant. I conducted IPR interviews in private settings that were convenient for the participant – usually in a conference room or the participant's personal office. Only the participant and I were present in the interview room. I reminded the participant that I was audio taping our interaction during the interview and then turned on the digital recorder and a back-up recorder.

Introduce the IPR interview. Kagan and Kagan (1991) developed a script that they used to explain the IPR interview process to participants. I customized this script to fit the current study and added a request that participants focus on what they recall thinking and feeling during each incident, rather than on interpretations of the situation that emerge during the interview (Levitt, 2001; Rennie, 1992; Rober et al., 2008). The script was as follows:

> When we interact with other people we have thoughts and feelings. We experience images or mental pictures. We may want to create a specific impression – or avoid giving others the wrong impression. We have feelings and sense the feelings others. Often, we become aware that we are anticipating certain responses from others. Sometimes these are responses we want, sometimes ones we fear.
>
> If I asked you now to recall some of the thoughts, feelings, or images that you experienced when you interjected humor into your group's conversation, you probably could remember some, but I think

you'll find that watching yourself on video is a powerful stimulant for memory. You'll find that you're able to remember your own thoughts and feelings as well as images, thoughts, and feelings you sensed that other people had. My role will be to ask you to elaborate on your experience of that moment.

As you answer my questions, please focus on what you recall experiencing in the moment that I captured on videotape. You may be tempted to come up with interpretations or explanations for your behavior or for the behavior of your fellow group members as we talk. Please keep in mind that I'm interested in what was going on for you in the moment you initiated humor--your recall of your experience, not an explanation for your behavior that you create today. If you have any questions for me, feel free to jump in at any time.

Play video clip of humor incident. Protocol for the IPR interview was as follows:

1. Play the humor incident segment from beginning to end. (Each segment will include 30 seconds of video footage before and 30 seconds of video after the humor incident.)
2. Replay the humor incident clip, stopping the video immediately after the participant interjected humor into the group interaction.
3. Commence the IPR interview by asking the first question.

Just in case a participant wanted to see a longer segment of the video or struggled to respond to the interview questions, I had video and audio back-up of the entire group meeting available. None of the participants requested to see or hear additional footage.

Conduct IPR interview. The IPR interview is flexible. I started each interview with same question, but I chose follow-up questions based on the participant's response. The first question was always: "What was going on for you when you made that humorous comment?" Additional questions that I posed in various interviews include:

- What were you thinking when you initiated humor?
- What were you feeling when you initiated humor?
- How did you know that this was a good moment for adding humor to the discussion?
- How much did you think about this comment (or nonverbal action) before making it?
- What were you hoping to accomplish by interjecting humor?
- What impact did you want your comment (or nonverbal action) to have (Kagan & Kagan, 1991)?
- How did you want the group (or another individual) to perceive you?
- How did you think the group would react to your humorous comment?
- What did you think the rest of the group was thinking and/or feeling

about you when you interjected humor?

At the end of the IPR interview, I asked participants to describe their perceptions of the research process:

- How were you affected by the presence of the camera during the group interaction?
- How do you think the group was affected by the presence of the camera? Did people behave differently than they typically do? If so, how?
- What is it like to watch yourself on video and to answer questions about your production of humor?

Debrief participants who did not complete an IPR interview. After I completed all IPR interviews, I sent a debriefing e-mail to any participants who did not complete an IPR interview. In this message, I revealed the research question, explained my interest in humor, and described the IPR interview process I completed with group members who produced humor during the meeting.

Transcribe video from meetings and interviews. I submitted audio clips of humor incidents and the IPR interviews to a transcription service (recommended by one of my committee members) as the recordings became available. While some forms of data analysis require specific forms of transcription, "thematic analysis does not require the same level of detail in the transcript as conversation, discourse, or even narrative analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). A professional transcriptionist provided verbatim transcription of each

recording, leaving space on the right side of each page where I could note significant nonverbal communication that would aid in my interpretation of the transcript.

Criteria for evaluating IPR process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend specific criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of constructivist studies. Trustworthiness refers to how "an inquirer [can] persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of, [and] what arguments can be mounted, what criteria invoked, what questions asked, that would be persuasive on this issue" (p. 290). Two trustworthiness criteria are relevant to the data gathering stage of this study: dependability and confirmability. Dependability focuses on the process of the inquiry and the inquirer's responsibility for ensuring that process was followed. Qualitative research is likely to be deemed dependable if the researcher establishes a process that is logical, traceable, and documented (Kenny & Holloway, 2006). The protocol for IPR inherently enhances dependability. The steps of administering the method are clear and standardized, and by videotaping each stage in the IPR process, the researcher creates traceable documentation of the research method.

My experience with IPR and interviewing are relevant to dependability criteria as well. In July 2008, I conducted a pilot study at the European Group for Organizational Studies conference. Although the format of the study was slightly different from the current study (group IPR interviews versus individual

interviews), I was able to gain experience with the method. Also, as a master's level industrial-organizational psychologist, I frequently interview clients. Feedback from clients and partners at my firm indicates that I have the ability to quickly develop rapport with participants, to softly steer a conversation, and to gather the data I seek. These skills easily translate to the inquirer role I played during IPR interviews.

Confirmability is concerned with establishing the fact that the data and interpretations of an inquiry are not merely figments of the inquirer's imagination (Kenny & Holloway, 2006). The participants' responses to IPR questions are documented on video, so the accuracy of the data is easily confirmed by viewing the tapes. The data generated by IPR interviews are not "figments of the inquirer's imagination" because they are the words of the participants themselves. At this stage in the research process, I did not interpret transcripts of the IPR interviews. I address credibility and transferability criteria later in this chapter.

Rationale for Methodological Fit: Thematic Analysis

The data for my dissertation study were the transcripts of IPR interviews, and the unit of analysis was the humor incident. I performed a thematic analysis (TA) of the interview transcripts. TA is a process for encoding qualitative information that focuses on the identification of patterns or themes in seemingly disconnected data (Boyatzis, 1998). Because very little research exists about the experience of the humor producer, the analysis was inductive or emergent--

themes emerged from the data themselves (as opposed to trying to fit the data into a pre-existing coding frame or the researcher's analytic preconceptions). The goal of the TA is to identify the core meanings, essences, or themes that emerge across all of the IPR interviews. The outcome of my study is an analysis of these themes--a rich examination of the participants' experiences of producing humor – which I report in Chapters 4 and 5.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), many researchers across a wide range of disciplines conduct TA but fail to explicitly identify it as such; it is "a poorly demarcated and rarely acknowledged, yet widely used qualitative analytic method" (p. 77). In fact, searching for themes is one of the analytic approaches that qualitative researchers reference most frequently in their reports (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997). For several reasons, TA was an excellent fit as a method for analyzing data in the current study.

Strengths of TA. Data analysis in this study involved examination of 43 humor incidents. TA enabled me to summarize key features of this data set, to create "thick description" of the data set, to highlight similarities *and* differences across the data set, and to generate unanticipated insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 97). All of these functions moved the study toward its goal of uncovering and understanding the humor producer's subjective experience.

Also, like IPR, TA is an excellent fit for the state of research on humor production. As I noted earlier in this chapter, the state of research on humor production is nascent. Based on Edmonson and McManus' (2007) framework, an

exploratory, qualitative method like TA is a good fit for a study of humor producers.

Finally, TA is a better fit for this study than the four other qualitative methods I considered – grounded theory, template analysis, classical content analysis, and action-implicative discourse analysis. Grounded theory did not fit the study because its "data collection and analytic procedures aim to develop theory" (Charmaz, 1995, p. 27). The goal of this study was to produce an initial description and interpretation of humor producers' experience – not to develop theory. In addition, the research protocol in this study is inconsistent with grounded theory. Based on my interests as a researcher, I defined humor production as the topic of interest. Grounded theory approach to this study would focus on humor production only if it emerged as a category during interviews with participants about their experiences of the meeting (E. Holloway, personal communication, May 14, 2009).

Action-implicative discourse analysis (AIDA) assists researchers in understanding "problematic communicative practices – the character of interactional problems, the conversational strategies used to address them, and participants' situated ideals about appropriate responses to them" (Tracy, 1995, p. 198). While humor production may sometimes contribute or respond to a problematic communication, research indicates that it is also associated with many positive, facilitative functions and outcomes. Therefore, AIDA was not an

appropriate fit for this study; it would bias the analysis toward instances of problematic communication.

Classical content analysis refers to techniques for reducing texts to a unit-by-variable matrix and analyzing that matrix quantitatively to test hypotheses. Generally, a researcher who uses classical content analysis has already discovered and described the codes of interest (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). This method is most useful when a researcher seeks to transform qualitative data into quantitative data in order to perform statistical analyses. Thus, classical content analysis was not a fit for this phenomenologically-based, qualitative study.

The TA process I describe in this chapter is very similar to King's (2004) template analysis method. The main difference between the two approaches is that a researcher conducting template analysis develops a tentative framework of codes *before* beginning the data analysis process. The emergent version of TA I used in this study avoids placing initial parameters on codes. Because very little research exists about the internal experience of humor production, this emergent coding process was a more appropriate methodological choice than template analysis.

Potential limitations of TA. Boyatzis (1998) identifies two threats to using thematic analysis effectively that are relevant to this study--projection and personal characteristics of the researcher (he titles this threat "mood and style").

Projection. At times, researchers' own experiences, opinions, or knowledge of a topic prevent them from truly "hearing" or understanding

participants' unique perspectives. Projection occurs when a researcher attributes his or her own values or conceptualization of an event to a participant. As in all research that involves ambiguous qualitative data, projection was a risk in this study. I managed this risk by staying close to participants' experiences, developing explicit codes, establishing consistency of judgment, working with two coders and a peer debriefer, and checking my interpretations with participants during IPR interviews. I discuss these practices in detail below in the TA protocol section of this chapter.

Researcher's work style. Conducting a qualitative analysis can be confusing and overwhelming, and a researcher's "fatigue and/or sensory overload, frustration with the raw information or concepts or confusion as to the unit of analysis . . . will decrease his or her ability to conduct thematic analysis" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 15). Thematic analysis requires researchers to make many subjective decisions, and those who have a tendency to obsess over arriving at a perfect answer are likely to struggle with this method. Luckily, I have some experience with thematic analysis. Last year, I conducted a thematic analysis study for a client that involved hour-long interviews with over 300 participants. The analysis process was long and laborious, but I successfully completed it.

Perhaps my biggest challenge was to avoid categorizing data too quickly and potentially overlooking data that did not easily fit into established codes. Patton (2002) suggests that searching for negative cases may counteract this common tendency. Negative cases "are a source of rival interpretations as well

as a way of placing boundaries around confirmed findings. They may be 'exceptions that prove the rule' or exceptions that disconfirm and alter what appeared to be primary patterns" (p. 239). I actively searched for negative cases and revised codes accordingly.

Protocol for Analyzing Data via TA

Identify IPR interviews for use in analysis. As I explained in the IPR protocol section of this chapter, I *collected* up to six humor incidents per participant, but I a*nalyzed* a maximum of two incidents per participant. Including more than two incidents per participant would allow those participants who produced a greater volume of humor to unduly influence the results of the study. For participants who contributed more than one humor incident, I reviewed the video and transcripts of their IPR interviews and chose the one or two incidents that provided the richest response or a perspective or humor style (Craik & Ware, 1998; Martin et al., 2003) that was not yet represented within the data. Also, for any given participant, I excluded incidents in which the humor and/or the participant's responses to IPR questions was repetitive; when I included more than one incident for a participant, the two incidents differed significantly from one another, and the associated IPR interviews provided distinct and interesting insight.

Write throughout the analysis process. Writing in thematic analysis is much more than a record of the researcher's thinking and decision-making process: "Writing is an integral part of the analysis, not something that takes

place at the end . . . [It] should begin . . . with the jotting down of ideas and potential coding schemes and continue right through the entire coding/analysis process" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). In their book on writing qualitative research, Ely et al. (1997) explain that "writing is at the heart of our endeavors to reflect, to be thoughtful, to tame and to shape the compost heap of data that is filled with disparate, confusing, and overwhelming raw impressions" (p. 15). Writing as a way of discovering and explaining my thinking (often called "memoing"), was an essential part of each TA phase described below (Schwandt, 2001).

Recognize the recursive nature of TA phases. Describing Braun and Clarke's (2006) six distinct TA phases enables me to describe in writing the overall work of TA. However, the phases actually blended together as I continually dove into the data, developed codes, identified themes, returned to the data, and performed necessary revisions. I moved back and forth among the phases described below as necessary throughout the study.

Phase 1: Familiarize yourself with your data. Phase 1 focuses on reading and re-reading all IPR interview transcripts and noting initial ideas. Braun and Clarke (2006) encourage the researcher to develop familiarity with the depth and breadth of the data. They also recommend reading actively, searching for meanings and patterns. During this phase, I sent two transcripts to my coding team, two recent graduates of the Leadership and Change program whose own dissertations required them to code qualitative data. All three of us read through

the transcripts, taking notes and marking ideas to which we wanted to return to in later phases.

Phase 2: Generate initial codes. Boyatzis (1998) refers to codes as "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way" (p. 63). While meanings and patterns are said to "emerge" during this phase, it is important to recognize that themes do not actually reside within the data; "if themes 'reside' anywhere, they reside in our heads from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them" (Ely et al., 1997, p. 206). So, although TA provides the framework for a researcher to develop codes that stay very close to participants' own descriptions of their lived experiences, a researcher's values, perspectives, and preconceived notions affect coding and interpretation.

To provide a "check" on my interpretation of the data, the coders and I worked independently to generate codes for the two initial transcripts. Both coders submitted their coding to me, and I integrated the codes, noting all instances of agreement and disagreement. Braun and Clarke (2006) guidelines for this phase guided our work:

- Give equal attention to each data item.
- Identify interesting aspects in the data items that may form the basis of themes.
- Code all data extracts.
- Code for as many potential themes as possible.

- Capture some of the data that surrounds the coded text (to provide context later, if needed).
- Do not ignore or attempt to smooth out tensions or inconsistencies in the data.
- Place individual extracts of data into multiple codes simultaneously, if applicable.

Next, I submitted a copy of the integrated codes to both coders, and we convened via conference call. We discussed each instance where our codes differed and, together, developed a code on which we could all agree. Most areas of disagreement at this stage involved the level of interpretation that was appropriate for initial codes. For example, consider the following line of dialogue from Magnum's interview:

Magnum: I thought others would think it was funny.

My initial code for this line referred to a potential latent meaning behind Magnum's comment: "considering others' evaluations of my humor." However, my coding team encouraged me to avoid interpreting the data too early in the process and to adopt more literal codes; we ended up coding the line as "thought others would think it funny." By initially creating manifest (as opposed to latent) codes, I am confident that interpretations later in the coding process remained closer to participants' own words and meanings.

We repeated the steps of phase two three more times until we had completed coding six transcripts. At this point in the process, some codes were

beginning to recur, and our coding was starting to coalesce around a common level of interpretation and uniform terminology. The second coder exited the process, and the first coder and I again repeated the work of phase two until we had completed coding five additional transcripts. During phase 2, I also sent participants copies of their IPR interview transcripts via e-mail, requesting that they contact me with any questions or corrections. Those who responded indicated that the transcripts appeared accurate, and none of the participants requested significant changes.

Phase 3: Search for themes. To facilitate completion of this phase, I first transferred the coding our team had completed into NVIVO, a computer program that assists in organizing the coding process, and finished coding all remaining transcripts. Then, my focus shifted from the long list of individual codes created in phase 2 toward the broader level of themes. A theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82, italics in original). Braun and Clarke's guidelines for this phase guided my approach:

- Consider how different codes may combine to form an overarching theme.
- Think about the relationship between codes, between themes, and between themes and potential sub-themes.
- Do not abandon any data during this phase.

The product of phase 3 was a collection of potential themes and sub-themes as well as all of the data extracts that had been coded within them. At this juncture, the first coder shifted into the role of peer debriefer. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a peer debriefer has four main functions – to keep the inquirer honest by playing the role of "devil's advocate," to provide an opportunity to test working hypotheses, to develop next steps in the emerging methodological design, and to provide the researcher and opportunity for catharsis. Thus, the coder who shifted into the role of peer debriefer stopped coding transcripts and began to review my work, posing questions and challenging my thinking during weekly conference calls.

The peer debriefer was particularly helpful in assisting me to identify the portions of the data that most directly addressed my research question. During IPR interviews, participants talked about the experience of producing humor, but they also discussed other topics that were outside the scope of my study. The peer debriefer encouraged me to stay focused on data that dealt with "in the moment" experiences of producing humor and challenged me when she witnessed me veering off into interesting but tangential territory.

Phase 4: Review themes. The first goal of this phase is to ensure that data attached to each potential theme form a coherent pattern. "A good thematic code," writes Boyatzis (1998) "is one that captures the qualitative richness of the phenomenon [and] is usable in the analysis, interpretation, and presentation of the research" (p. 31). The second goal of this phase is to ascertain whether the

themes relate logically to the entire data set. Each theme should appear valid when considering all IPR interviews together, and identifiable distinctions should exist *between* themes. Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines for this phase are:

- Identify potential themes that need to be eliminated – those that do not have enough data to support them or that include data that are too diverse.
- Identify potential themes that may be combined.
- If themes do not work in relation to the data set as a whole, return to reviewing and refining codes until a satisfactory "thematic map" (p. 92) emerges.
- When refining themes no longer adds anything substantial, stop.

The work of phase 4 involved repeated reviews of my codes and themes – both on my own and with the help of the peer debriefer. At the end of phase 4, I had a sense of the different themes, how they fit together, and "the overall story they tell about the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92).

Phase 5: Define and name themes. Once themes were clarified and revised accordingly, deep analysis and detailed description began. The goal of this phase was to create a narrative about each theme that described its scope and content and was internally consistent. Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines for this phase include:

- Identify the essence of each theme – what is of interest about it and why.
- Ensure that themes are not overly diverse or complex.
- Explain how each theme fits into the broader overall story of the study.
- Describe sub-themes (themes-within-a-theme) when they exist.
- Define each theme using a couple of sentences.
- Choose theme names for use in the final analysis; names should be "concise, punchy, and immediately give the reader a sense of what the theme is about" (p. 93).

Phase 6: Produce the report. Phase 6 is analogous to Chapter 4 of this dissertation. Chapter 4 explores each theme in depth as well as describes connections among the themes. It also includes excerpts from the data set that illustrate each theme and sub-theme.

Criteria for evaluating TA. Two of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria relevant to the thematic analysis portion of this study are transferability and credibility. Transferability deals with the applicability of results to other situations (Kenny & Holloway, 2006). The burden of determining transferability of qualitative results is on the reader. I have attempted to describe my method in detail. In Chapter 4, I attempt to provide extensive information about participants that will enable readers to determine for themselves which parts (if any) of the study are relevant to their own situations.

Credibility addresses the issue of fit between respondents' views of their

lived experience and the inquirer's reconstruction and representation of the same (Kenny & Holloway, 2006). The coders and peer debriefer provided one source of credibility in this study. They coded a number of transcripts and challenged my interpretations, specifically focusing on areas where they perceived a lack of connection between my thinking and participants' words.

The IPR method inherently contains a member checking process, the most direct test of the study's credibility. Member checking involves soliciting feedback from participants about the researcher's interpretations and/or conclusions (Schwandt, 2001). Throughout the IPR interview, as a participant reflected on his or her experiences of producing humor, I responded by providing my interpretation of their statements. Immediately, participants were able to accept or disagree with my interpretation. The following exchange with Queen is a typical example of how I continuously checked my interpretation of participants' statements:

> Queen: I mean, it's hard to hear the truth sometimes.
>
> Lisa: And what's the truth that you were trying to convey there?
>
> Queen: That, that if that's, I didn't think that was a valid area to look at.
>
> Lisa: That listening didn't measure something that was relevant to [your school]?
>
> Queen: It did not – not at all.

Queen explained that she used humor to convey the "truth." To ensure I understood what she meant by "the truth," I asked her to elaborate on her meaning. Then, when she indicated that the listening portion of a test (which

was the topic of the current discussion) did not measure a "valid area," I paraphrased her statement, giving her a chance to confirm or refute that I understood her meaning correctly--that she was talking about the inappropriateness of the listening portion of the test for Queen's particular school. Thus, transcripts of exchanges like the one above with Queen bolster the credibility of the study by providing evidence of the internal member checking process.

Summary

In this chapter, I have presented my rationale for choosing IPR as the method for gathering data and thematic analysis as the method for analyzing data in this study. I have also described in detail the protocol that guided me through the research process. Combined, IPR and TA were an excellent fit for this phenomenologically-oriented, qualitative study of spontaneous humor producers' subjective experiences.

Chapter IV: Results of the Study

In this chapter, I present the data from the Emergent Thematic Analysis of IPR interview data. In the first section of the chapter, I review the process for selecting humor incidents and introduce the participants. In the second section, I review the core findings of the study and address basic findings first and overall themes second.

Summary of Humor Incidents

As I explained in Chapter 3, I relied on my perception of humor, audience laughter, voice patterns, and speech patterns to identify humor incidents that occurred during group meetings. Interestingly, my personal perception of humor did not influence my identification of humor incidents as much as I had expected. Often, I accurately identified a humor incident based solely on the producer's tone of voice or the audience's reaction to nonverbal or verbal interjection without personally understanding why the incident was funny. (Only one participant indicated that he was not intending to be funny during an incident I identified, so the use of cues beyond my personal perception of humor was apparently quite accurate.) Upon reading IPR interview transcripts, my dissertation chair shared the following reaction, "If you gave me [these] transcripts and asked me to identify the humorous comment, I couldn't identify a single one. None of these comments are funny, even within the context of reading the transcript, and that's surprising. There isn't a true one-liner in the bunch. This suggests to me that humor is even more subtle than I thought--

completely contextual to the complex dynamics of the group at the time" (J. Wergin, personal communication, December 9, 2009).

The highly contextual nature of the humor incidents makes it very difficult to describe them to readers of this study. A recap of the incidents is beyond the scope of the current study--the focus here is on participants' experiences of producing humor, not on the humor itself. However, some examples of the types of humor that emerged include participants sarcastically mocking other employees and/or customers, poking fun at absent team members, referencing private jokes about specific projects, joking about annoying job requirements, imitating exasperating students, putting themselves and/or their team down, making absurd or nonsense comments, emitting exaggerated sounds, and gesturing dramatically.

The Emergent Thematic Analysis below includes *one* IPR interview with each participant who produced a single incident of humor and *up to two* IPR interviews with each participant who produced more than one humor incident. For participants who contributed more than one humor incident, I reviewed the video and transcripts of their IPR interviews and chose the one or two incidents that provided the richest response or a perspective or humor style (Craik & Ware, 1998; Martin et al., 2003) that was not yet represented within the data. Also, for any given participant, I excluded incidents in which the humor and/or the participant's responses to IPR questions was repetitive; when I included more than one incident for a participant, the two incidents differed significantly

from one another, and the associated IPR interviews provided distinct and interesting insight.

Participants

Five work groups representing a diverse range of organizations participated in the study, including: a legal department at a public utility, the staff of a non-profit organization that provides social services, the lead teachers of a private elementary school, the staff of a Jewish synagogue, and the legal department of a commercial real estate company. A total of forty people participated in the meetings I videotaped (see Table 4.1). Twenty-six of these participants produced 66 incidents of humor and, thus, completed IPR interviews (see Table 2). After identifying a maximum of two rich and unique humor incidents per participant, 43 humor incidents emerged for inclusion in data analysis.

Table 4.1.
Demographics of All Study Participants[a]

Demographic	Frequency	% of Sample
Gender		
Female	25	63
Male	15	37
Age Range		
21-25	1	2.5
26-30	4	10
31-35	5	12.5
36-40	6	15
41-45	3	7.5
46-50	10	25
51-55	3	7.5
56-60	4	10
61-65	2	5
66-70	2	5
Years of Tenure		
0-5	23	57.5
6-10	7	17.5
11-15	5	12.5
16-20	2	5
21-25	0	0
26-30	3	7.5
Ethnicity		
White	34	85
Black	6	15
Job Level		
Manager	8	20
Professional	22	55
Administrative	10	25

[a] n=40

Table 4.2.
Demographics of IPR Participants[a]

Demographic	Frequency	% of Sample
Gender		
Female	17	65.4
Male	9	34.6
Age Range		
26-30	1	3.8
31-35	3	11.5
36-40	6	23.1
41-45	2	7.7
46-50	8	30.8
51-55	2	7.7
56-60	2	7.7
61-65	0	0
66-70	2	7.7
Years of Tenure		
0-5	13	50
6-10	5	19.3
11-15	3	11.5
16-20	2	7.7
21-25	0	0
26-30	3	11.5
Ethnicity		
White	24	92.3
Black	2	7.7
Job Level		
Manager	7	30.8
Professional	14	50
Administrative	5	19.3

[a]n=26

Legal department at a public utility.

The first work group to participate in the study was the legal department of a public utility. The utility employs over 20,000 people and owns electric, fiber optic, and communications subsidiaries in four southeastern states. The legal department is located within the shared services arm of the organization and provides in-house legal expertise, with each attorney dedicated to one or more of the company's business units. The role of the department is to coordinate system

policy for non-fuel related contracts on which the company spends over $5.5 billion per year. I have worked as a consultant for the utility intermittently for over the past nine years, but I have never consulted to the legal group.

As currently configured, the legal department has been together for a year and includes a team in A southern, metropolitan area and a team in another southern city. Eight team members from the Local office were present for the staff meeting I videotaped on November 2, 2009; one team member was absent due to illness. Six employees from the remote location participated by phone. The employees who participated by phone completed informed consent documents but were not eligible for inclusion in IPR interviews.

Magnum, one of the managing attorneys within the department, served as my contact with the team. She was extremely organized and responsive to my invitation to participate as well as to my request for information about the team. The atmosphere in the legal department was friendly and personable, and individual team members welcomed me warmly to both a preliminary meeting and to the staff meeting I videotaped. Before the preliminary meeting, two of the attorneys invited me to join them in sampling some home baked goodies that two of the attorneys had brought to share with everyone. The utility is located in a beautiful, formally appointed high-rise building downtown, and the legal department's offices are comfortable but corporate. All of the team members wore suits or business-appropriate attire. The staff meeting took place in a large

conference room, and team members sat facing each other around a sturdy wooden table.

The staff meeting I videotaped lasted 1 hour. Seven of the 8 Local team members (see Table 4.3) produced a total of 11 humor incidents, 10 of which were included in the analysis I report later in this chapter (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.3.
Demographics of IPR Participants at Legal Department of Public Utility[x]

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Years of Tenure	Ethnicity	Job Level
Bob	M	56-60	27	White	Professional
Grey	M	46-50	18	White	Manager
Jim	M	51-55	27	White	Professional
Magnum	F	36-40	3.5	White	Manager
Mary Pat	F	46-50	28	White	Professional
Shawn	M	31-35	2.5	White	Professional
Wendy	F	51-55	.5	White	Administrative

[x]n=7

Table 4.4.
Humor Incidents Produced by Participants at Legal Department of Public Utility

Participant	Number of Incidents Produced	Number of Incidents Included in Analysis
Bob	1	1
Grey	3	2
Jim	1	1
Magnum	2	2
Mary Pat	1	1
Shawn	2	2
Wendy	1	1
Total	11	10

Staff of a medical support non-profit organization.

The second work group participating in the study was the staff of a non-profit organization that provides social and medical support services to clients diagnosed with a specific disease. Founded in 1985, the mission of organization

is *to enhance the quality of life for people and families living with a specific disease and to prevent further spread of the disease through age-appropriate prevention education programs.* The organization provides a wide range of programming including procurement of medicines, medical supplies, food, and clothing as well as delivery of educational and emotional support services. The staff includes an Executive Director, program managers, social workers, and administrators.

My husband served on the board of this organization from 2006-2008, so I had met some of the staff members at fundraising events. I do not know any of the staff members well. The staff is diverse both ethnically and in terms of personality. Lauren, the Executive Director, described her staff by saying "they're *weird* people; I mean, let's just lay it out on the line."

The current staff has worked together for a little over a year, and most employees have five or fewer years of tenure with the organization. All 11 staff members were present for the meeting I videotaped on November 4, 2009. The atmosphere at the non-profit organization was very casual, and staff members wore comfortable, informal clothes. Everyone was friendly but – with the exception of except Lauren, the Executive Director – relatively reserved when interacting with me during a preliminary meeting and at the staff meeting I videotaped. The non-profit organization is located in an old, run-down building on the outskirts of downtown in a southern, metropolitan area. (One of the topics of discussion during the staff meeting was the need to jiggle the handle on the toilet to make sure it didn't run all day because there was no money in the

budget to hire a plumber.) The name of the non-profit organization is purposefully absent from the front of the building to ensure client confidentiality. The staff meeting took place in a room that serves as break room and conference space. Several team members sat around a medium-sized round table while others sat in mismatched chairs lining the perimeter of the room.

The staff meeting I videotaped lasted fifty-five minutes. Six of the 11 team members (see Table 4.5) produced a total of 11 humor incidents, 10 of which were included in the data analysis (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.5.
Demographics of IPR Participants at Medical Support Non-profit[x]

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Years of Tenure	Ethnicity	Job Level
Anna	F	46-50	15	White	Professional
Carmen	F	31-35	1.5	White	Professional
Lamont	M	46-50	1	Black	Administrative
Lauren	F	36-40	8	White	Manager
Marc	M	26-30	3	White	Professional
Natalie	F	66-70	5	White	Professional

[x]n=6

Table 4.6.
Humor Incidents Produced by Participants at Medical Support Non-profit

Participant	Number of Incidents Produced	Number of Incidents Included in Analysis
Anna	1	1
Carmen	2	2
Lamont	1	1
Lauren	3	2
Marc	2	2
Natalie	2	2
Total	11	10

Lead teachers at a private elementary school.

The lead teachers of a private school not far from a southern, metropolitan area also agreed to participate in this study. One of my personal friends, a clinical psychologist, recommended that I contact the school's principal to invite her team to participate in the study. The faculty of the school frequently refers children with psychological and/or learning challenges to my friend, and she described the group as lively, fun-loving, and generous. Prior to this study, I had now knowledge of the school and did not know any members of the lead teacher team. The school is an independent, secular, non-profit school that serves children from age 18 months through eighth grade. The school prides itself on its multi-cultural and socio-economically diverse student body.

It is located in a self-contained, planned community where all homes are built according to strict, traditional architectural guidelines and are constructed around a cozy and quaint town square. Residents of the town know each other and strive to maintain a close-knit, friendly atmosphere. When I stopped to get some iced tea on my way to videotape the lead teacher meeting on November 6, 2009, an older gentleman introduced himself and offered to accompany me to the coffee shop. He introduced me to almost every person we passed along the way.

The school is located in a beautiful new building that is US Green Building Council LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified, reflecting the faculty's commitment to teaching students to honor and protect the environment. Classrooms are non-traditional. Multiple teachers serve a single

classroom. Students from different grade levels work together and rotate amongst learning stations and sitting at communal tables rather than working at desks. The rooms are colorful, lively, and bustling with excitement.

Cowgirl, the school's principal, served as my contact with the lead teacher team. She was enthusiastic about participating in the study and made me feel comfortable from the moment I arrived for a preliminary meeting with the team. The team members were also extremely friendly, and it was immediately obvious that the team had excellent rapport. They joked with each other, laughing and socializing as both friends and colleagues. The meeting I videotaped took place in the upper elementary classroom. The team pushed three tables together in a L-shaped formation and sat facing each other around the tables.

The meeting I videotaped lasted 47 minutes. Five of the nine team members (see Table 4.7) produced a total of 19 humor incidents, nine of which were included in data analysis (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.7.
Demographics of IPR Participants at Private Elementary School[x]

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Years of Tenure	Ethnicity	Job Title
Corey	F	46-50	12	White	Professional
Cowgirl	F	36-40	12	White	Manager
Erma	F	66-70	5	White	Professional
Katie	F	31-35	10	White	Professional
Queen	F	41-45	10	White	Manager

[x]n=5

Table 4.8.
Humor Incidents Produced by Participants at Private Elementary School

Participant	Number of Incidents Produced	Number of Incidents Included in Analysis
Corey	4	2
Cowgirl	5	2
Erma	1	1
Katie	4	2
Queen	5	2
Total	19	9

Staff of a Jewish synagogue.

The mission of the Jewish synagogue staff that participated in the study is "engaging members in prayer, study, fellowship, and acts of loving kindness for our congregational family and the community at-large" (www.ourtemple.org). The synagogue serves over 750 families in a southern, metropolitan area. The professional staff includes an Executive Director, program managers, administrative and technical assistants, and custodians. One staff member was absent from the meeting on November 11, 2009.

I have been a member of the synagogue for 10 years but do not know the staff well. The Board of Directors hired the Executive Director (Len) only six months before the meeting I videotaped, so the team was still in the process of acclimating to his expectations and leadership style. I sat on the selection committee that extended a job offer to Len, but I did not interact with him beyond participation in a group interview. I had previously worked on a different committee with one staff member, Alana. Len served as my contact with the staff. He was very inquisitive, wanting to know as much as possible

about the study and how I planned to use videotaped footage of his team meeting. At my preliminary meeting with the staff, the team was very quiet. They did not pose any questions about the research during the preliminary meeting or later by e-mail. However, they all indicated a willingness to participate when I contacted them confidentially by e-mail and/or telephone prior to videotaping the meeting.

The synagogue is located in a vibrant section of a southern, metropolitan area on the outskirts of downtown. The building is stately and ornate; a recent renovation created modern office and classroom space while maintaining the character of the old, traditional façade. The staff meeting took place in the President's conference room. The staff sat around a very large table that more than accommodated the group; they congregated toward the end where they sat facing each other. Len sat at the head of the table. All of the team members were dressed in business casual attire and were friendly but formal in their interactions.

The meeting I videotaped lasted 47 minutes. Four of the eight staff members (see Table 4.9) produced a total of 10 humor incidents, six of which were included in data analysis (see Table 4.10.)

Table 4.9.
Demographics of IPR Participants at Jewish Synagogue[x]

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Years of Tenure	Ethnicity	Job Level
Alana	F	46-50	6	White	Professional
Lana	F	46-50	20	Black	Administrative
Len	M	56-60	.5	White	Manager
Sarah	F	36-40	2	White	Administrative

[x]n=4

Table 4.10.
Humor Incidents Produced by Participants at Jewish Synagogue

Participant	Number of Incidents Produced	Number of Incidents Included in Analysis
Alana	3	2
Lana	1	1
Len	5	2
Sarah	1	1
Total	10	6

Legal department of a commercial real estate company.

The legal department of a commercial real estate company was the final group to participate in the study. I videotaped their staff meeting on November 18, 2009. This department functions as an internal law firm for the company and is the primary provider of legal resources for all departments. The departments two attorneys, one paralegal, and one executive legal secretary spend most of their time negotiating leases and contracts into which the company enters, but they also provide a number of other legal services. Charlie, the attorney who heads up the group describes his team as the "researchers and institutional memory for what the company has done over time. . . .We are the readers, writers, and record keepers, so realistically that is probably our role as often as

not." As currently configured, the team has worked together for two and a half years.

The company specializes in high-end, stylish retail shopping centers and owns and/or is developing properties across the United States. I have consulted with the company's executive team for approximately seven years but had not met members of the legal department before conducting this study. The company is located near the downtown area of a southern, metropolitan city. Its offices are nicely but not extravagantly appointed; their retail developments are significantly more elaborate than the home office.

Charlie served as my main contact with the group. He was extremely gracious in accepting my invitation to participate and offered to be as flexible as possible in making time for a preliminary meeting. At this initial meeting, the team was outgoing and warm. They explained that they really enjoy working together and identify as a team that likes to have fun. Their only concern about participating in the study was that they often spend a lot of their meeting time "cutting up" and "joking around." They were worried that their meeting might not be substantive enough for my study. Of course, I encouraged them to act as naturally and normally as possible when I videotaped their meeting and silently hoped that they would not tone down their humorous behavior during the actual staff meeting. The meeting I videotaped took place in the company's executive conference room with the team of four sitting together at one end of a large table.

Charlie sat at the head of the table. The room is lined with a full wall of windows that look out over a busy, two-lane street.

The meeting I videotaped lasted one hour and 24 minutes. Although the team later described the meeting as slightly less humorous than normal, the four team members (see Table 4.11) produced a total of 15 humor incidents, 8 of which were included in data analysis (see Table 4.12).

Table 4.11.
Demographics of IPR Participants at Legal Department of Commercial Real Estate Company[x]

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Years of Tenure	Ethnicity	Job Level
Andy	M	36-40	3	White	Professional
Charlie	M	36-40	6	White	Manager
Nancy	F	41-45	5	White	Professional
Xena	F	46-50	2.5	White	Administrative

[x]n=4

Table 4.12.
Humor Incidents Produced by Participants at Legal Department of Commercial Real Estate Company

Participant	Number of Incidents Produced	Number of Incidents Included in Analysis
Andy	3	2
Charlie	4	2
Nancy	6	2
Xena	2	2
Total	15	8

Results of the Emergent Thematic Analysis of IPR Interviews

Participants' responses to IPR interview questions fell into three main divisions – core findings, tangential findings, and other findings (see Figure 4.1). Core findings are those data that directly address the research question: What is the subjective experience of the spontaneous humor producer? These data reflect participants' reports of their experiences immediately prior to and/or during the

production of humor. The core findings, in turn, fall into two categories--basic findings and themes (see Figure 4.1). Basic findings are the simplest level of experiences that participants reported during humor production, an inventory of this study's most essential results. Themes capture commonalities that exist *across* the basic findings, exploring the interaction among the different variables uncovered by the basic findings.

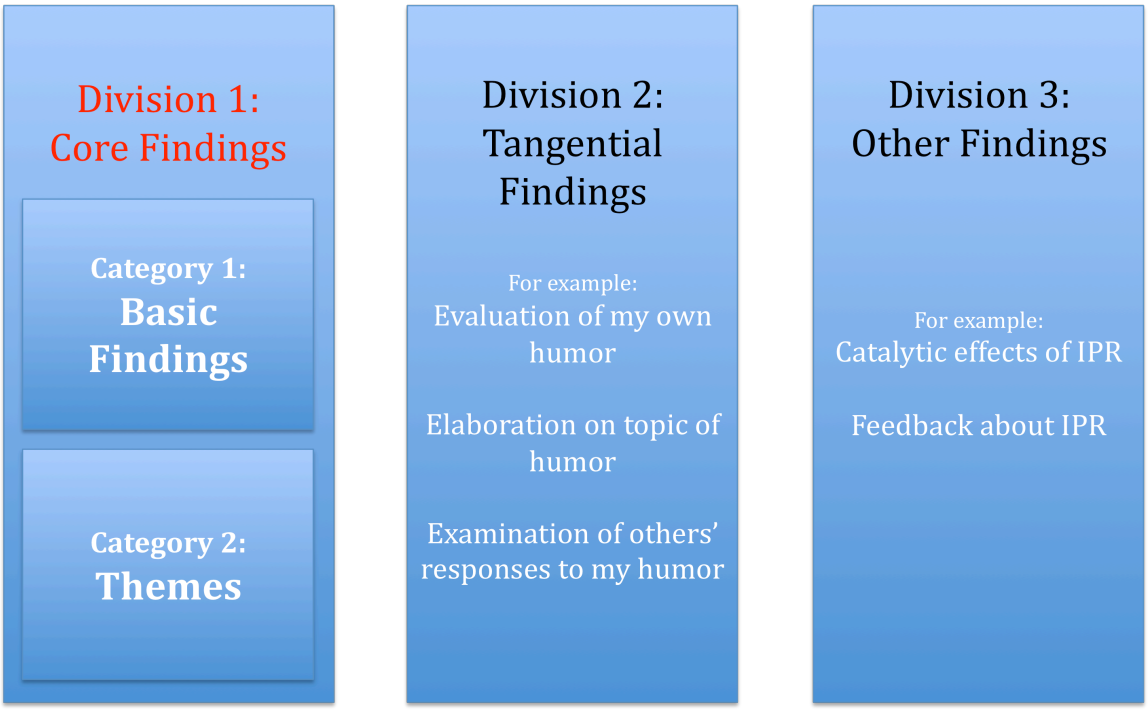

Figure 4.1. Three main divisions of findings.

Within the basic findings category, two subcategories emerged: (1) experiences of which participants were fully aware in the moment of humor production, and (2) experiences that were present "beneath the surface" in the moment of humor production that emerged into consciousness upon reflection (see Figure 4.2). Both types of experiences--those that were "conscious" and

those that were "latent but reflexively accessible"--are included in the basic findings category.

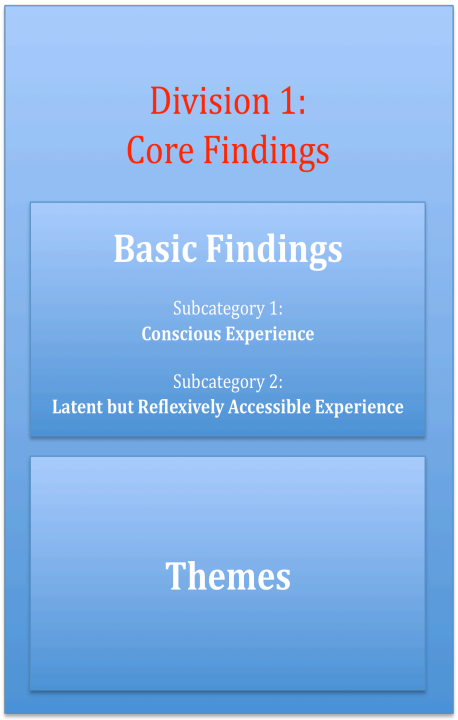

Figure 4.2. Division 1: Core findings.

These two subcategories probably do not reflect everything that is going on for a humor producer in the moment of humor production. It is likely that participants do not have access to all of the experiences that take place during humor production. For example, a participant may have learned a type of humorous response from observing a parent's behavior during early childhood but may not be consciously aware of this influence. The learned response influences the participant's interjection of humor, but he is not able (or willing) to identify it during the IPR interview. Thus, some experiences during humor production are "latent but *not* reflexively accessible." By definition, these data

did not emerge during IPR interviews and, thus, were not captured by the current study.

Data that fall into the division of tangential findings deal with humor production but do not reflect experiences that took place during the moment of humor production (see Figure 4.1). For example, during IPR interviews, many participants evaluated their own humor, elaborated on the topic of humor, or examined others' responses to their humor. Such topics may help illuminate the experience of producing humor but do not directly address the research question.

Finally, some of the data from IPR interviews fall into the division of "other findings" (see Figure 4.1). These data do not address humor production but represent the types of additional thoughts that the IPR process inspires; I refer to these thoughts as the "catalytic effects of IPR." For example, participants often shared information about themselves or their work groups that did not relate directly to their experiences of producing humor. Many participants also provided feedback about the IPR process itself: how being videotaped affected them personally, how being videotaped affected their work group, and how examining their own humor production on video affected them.

This chapter focuses on data in the "core findings" division. I explain the nature of the tangential and other findings categories but do not examine them in depth. I addressed participants' feedback about the IPR process in Chapter 3 and will share their feedback about the study in Chapter 5.

To further illustrate the differences among the three main divisions of data and the categories and subcategories within them, below I present examples drawn from Grey's IPR transcript. Grey is the head of the legal department at a public utility who holds the title of Vice-President and General Counsel for the company (see Table 4.3). He produced three humor incidents, two of which I included in data analysis (see Table 4.4). One of the humor incidents occurred as the local work team was discussing a tailgating party that was scheduled for the following week. Grey jumped into the discussion of logistics and directed a comment to one of the remotely located attorneys (who was participating by conference call), "I'm not gonna make you come over here, but Pat, you may want to run and hide because that's gonna be the week after the [football team Grey supports] – [football team Pat supports] game. You may not be interested in doing *anything*." Both the local and remote teams laughed heartily in response to this comment.

When I asked Grey what was going on for him when he interjected this instance of humor, his responses included basic findings about his *conscious* experience of producing humor as well as parts of his experience that were *latent but reflexively accessible*. For instance, he was consciously aware that the local team had not invited the remote team to the party and that discussing the event in front of them might be rude. The remote team might feel left out:

> I was probably sitting there thinking, "I forgot 'em, so let's make 'em feel like they're included here." I can remember sitting there thinking that when I was saying this, "Oh man, we forgot all about [other city]," so I

> was trying to do that. (Division: Core finding → Category: Basic finding → Subcategory: Conscious experience)

Upon reflection, he also remembered being aware of the reasons the local team did not invite the remote team to the party:

> You know, we're under cost constraints right now and I'm not gonna send people from [other city] to [our location] to have a luncheon where we're celebrating [two rival football teams] or whatever. (Division: Core finding → Category: Basic finding → Subcategory: Latent but reflexively available experience)

Grey did not remember thinking about the cost constraints consciously during the moment of humor production; however, during the IPR interview, he recalled that this knowledge was present and relevant to his decision to use humor as a way to include the remote team without actually inviting them to attend the party.

The IPR interview also sparked thoughts about what Grey generally wants to accomplish through humor. The excerpt below represents data that fall into the "tangential findings" division. It involves Grey's examination of his own humor but does not address the specific humor incident on which the IPR interview was focused:

> Sometimes I feel like at these staff meetings everybody comes in and just sits there and listens, waits for me to update 'em on everything, and I try to use humor to help people open up a little up, to be a little more open about some of their updates and all. Because I can go through and tell you right now, that person's comfortable in a setting like that, that one's not, that one is, that one's not, and I can point that out to you. I use humor sometimes to make people feel a little more at ease. (Division: Tangential finding)

The IPR process also led Grey to evaluate aspects of himself beyond his use of

humor. These data fall into the "other findings" division:

> I do need to lose weight, and the camera adds about 20 pounds to your look, and I don't like it . . . I have this thing, and I saw it just watching it there. I always put stuff in front of my face, and I talk when I've got stuff in front of my face. I've been advised for 20 years, "Quit doing that." I was watching. I did it three times in the clips. (Division: Other findings)

These reflections, while interesting, do not enhance our understanding of Grey's humor production experience.

Basic Findings

As mentioned previously, this chapter focuses on the core findings, data about participants' experiences in the moment of humor production. It begins with a discussion of the basic findings category (see Figure 4.2), an inventory of this study's most essential results. Formally investigating and describing everyday phenomena that have not previously been explicated in this manner adds meaningfully to the humor literature. As I mention in Chapter 2, much research that purports to examine producers' motivations for interjecting humor actually focuses on the *functions* or *effects* of humor, what happens *after* the humor is produced rather than what is going on during humor production. Providing a detailed review of the most fundamental findings of this study is important because it represents the first investigation of humor production from the perspective of the humor producer. As Zimmerman and Polner (1970) argued, social scientists must move past situations in which "common-sense recognitions and descriptions [of the everyday world] are pressed into service as fundamentally unquestioned resources for analyzing the phenomena" (p. 81).

Research has yet to question the common assumption that a humor producer's intentions and the resulting functions of his or her humor are one and the same. In this section, I add depth and detail to some common-sense recognitions about humor production and, hopefully, reveal some new knowledge as well.

Participants reported being *consciously aware* of three types of experiences during humor production--external cues, thoughts, and feelings (see Figure 4.3). Below, I present a narrative description of each basic finding along with quotations that illustrate how it manifested in participant interviews. (Some quotes may illustrate multiple basic findings.)

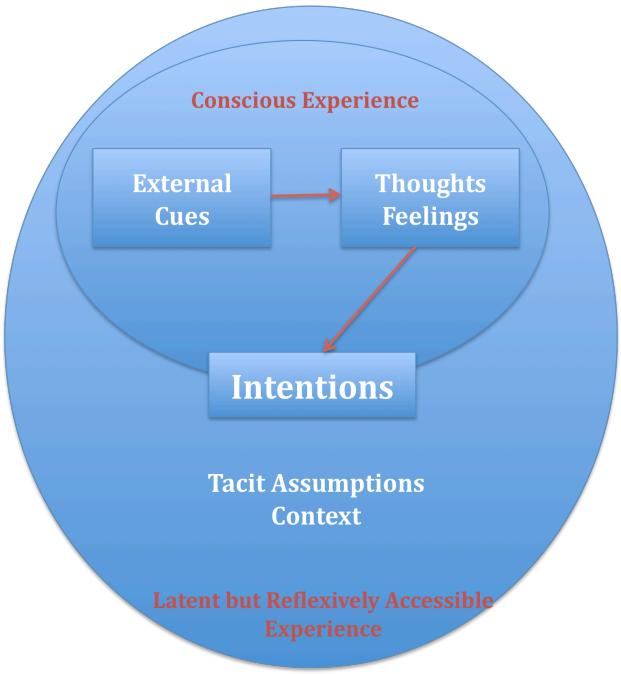

Figure 4.3. Category 1: Basic findings.

Conscious experience.

Basic finding 1: Participants were consciously aware of external verbal and sensory cues that stimulated spontaneous humor. An external cue is a

stimulus to action or sensory signal that takes place outside of the humor producer. External cues included verbal cues, sensory cues, and a combination of the two (see Figure 4.4).

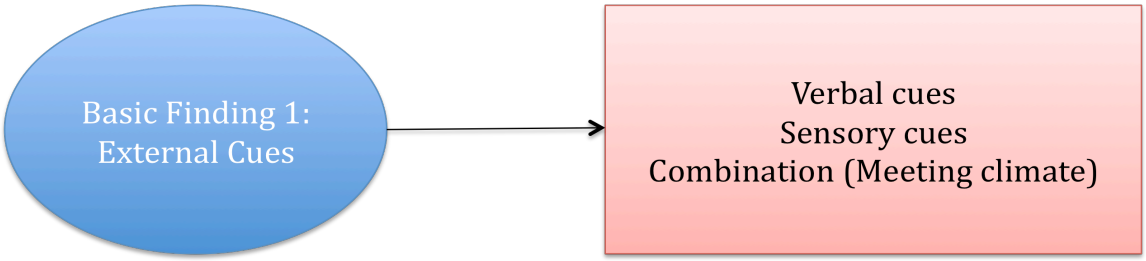

Figure 4.4. Basic finding 1: Participants were consciously aware of external verbal and sensory cues that stimulated spontaneous humor.

Verbal cues. Some participants identified verbal cues--comments by other people--that stimulated their humor production. For example, Len explained one of his humorous interjections as a direct reaction to a serious comment by Sarah:

> Len: I pick up on wha*t she's* [Sarah] saying because she's the one that would have been the catalyst for me coming in.

In some instances, the absence of verbalization (silence) following a comment actually served as a verbal cue:

> Shawn: It just seemed like a quiet moment to make a funny remark. I mean, you know, Grey had kind of made a stab at it, and no one really responded to that, so I kind of thought that was an opportunity for me to respond.

Several participants indicated that verbal cues were especially salient when a person with whom they have a "joking relationship" (Apte, 1985, p. 29) produced them. Apte defines a joking relationship as "patterned playful behavior that occurs between two individuals who recognize special kinship or

other types of social bonds between them" (p. 30). Queen explains her humorous interjection as a reaction to her frequent joking partner, Cowgirl:

> Queen: In particular, that would have been directly in response to Cowgirl because we one-up each other a lot. Socially, that's very much the dynamic between us.

Interestingly, *comments by a boss* served as verbal cues more often than comments by peers. Magnum heard her boss Grey make a comment and decided to build on what he was saying:

> Magnum: It fit in perfectly with what Grey was saying. Because truly it just did come out as sort of an attempt to have a natural progression to what Grey was saying. And an emphasis on what Grey was saying.

Likewise, a comment by Lamont's boss Lauren inspired him to contribute humor:

> Lamont: But like I said, when she said Christmas music, I just instantly thought about Marc and that [in] July he wanted to start Christmas music, and I thought, "Oh my God."

Sometimes the origin of verbal cues seemed less important than the form of the cues themselves. Magnum perceived *comments that occurred quickly and in a series* as a cue that it was a good time to add humor to the conversation:

> Magnum: That was sort of a ping-ponging back around the table and kind of everybody was interjecting something.

Len also sees himself as contributing to a series of comments:

> Len: He makes the idea, which is not good. She jumps in and says, "I'll be part of it." I make another joke to wrap it all around.

Sensory cues. Some external humor cues are *non*verbal. Participants indicated that others' body language such as the shaking of a head and/or

specific facial expressions served as sensory cues to humor. Shawn felt he had permission to interject humor because of the way Grey was looking at him:

> Shawn: It was Grey kind of, the look on his face, that kind of led me to think that was okay to do.
>
> Lisa: And how did you interpret that look on his face? What did that mean to you?
>
> Shawn: "I know that your projects are crazy, so what do you have to offer us today?" You know? I mean, kind of an invitation a little bit.

Queen made a humorous comment when her colleague Katie squeezed her knee under the table:

> Queen: The other thing, too, Katie got me going on that because she was going like this under the table. [demonstrates how Katie was touching her knee]
>
> Lisa: So what did that say to you?
>
> Queen: That got me going, like we're laughing and cutting up now.

Combination of verbal and sensory cues. Often, a combination of verbal and sensory cues occurred together, providing participants with a sense of the overall atmosphere in which the exchange was taking place. This sense of the atmosphere or awareness of the "meeting climate" (Rutkowski, Kakusho, Kryssanov, & Minoh, 2004) emerged as an important element of external cues for several participants. Some participants were motivated to interject humor based on the *nature of the current exchange* or the type of conversation they perceived was taking place. For example, Natalie indicated that she thought it was an appropriate moment to interject humor because the group was presently engaged in banter as opposed to serious conversation:

> Natalie: There was just more or less banter going on, and so it wouldn't have been like breaking in the middle of a prayer to say something, you know . . . that it was just sort of loose time.

Katie decided to interject humor when she sensed that the nature of the current exchange was relaxed:

> Katie: When we're all freely discussing more things, it seems easier to say things like that I guess.

Other participants were sensitive to the *group's mood* when initiating humor. Magnum viewed the group as relaxed and, therefore, concluded it was a good moment for humor:

> Magnum: It was a relaxed sort of moment. Um, you know, it was something where I *did* feel like we were all talking and all enjoying each other's company.

Shawn, on the other hand, felt the need to lighten things up when the team's mood seemed too stiff and formal:

> Shawn: I mean it just seemed kind of stuffy and there wasn't, you know, hadn't been a whole lot of kind of light, a light mood in there at all.

Comments about Basic Finding 1. Commonality emerged regarding the specific *elements* of cues of which participants were consciously aware during humor production. However, within these cue elements (meeting climate, verbal cues, and sensory cues), the *nature* of the cue that an individual will deem salient depends entirely on that person's characteristics. For example, as one can see by comparing Magnum and Shawn's comments about the nature of the group mood that inspired them to produce humor, one person's cue is another person's deterrent. For Magnum, a relaxed moment indicated group readiness for humor

while for Shawn, it was a stiff or stuffy moment that cued humor. Len interpreted a comment by Sarah as a cue to interject humor while it was silence that sparked Shawn's humorous comment. Also, Shawn perceived Grey's facial expression to be a relevant external cue while Queen focused on the importance of physical touch. The experience of humor production is both highly contextual – dependent on and responsive to the current environment – and personal.

Basic finding 2: Most humor producers were consciously aware of certain feelings when they initiated humor. Basic Findings 1 and 2 are closely linked; external cues usually led to feelings of which participants were aware during humor production (see Figure 4.3). Some, like Queen, identified their feelings as internal triggers to producing humor:

> Queen: I think the best explanation for why I said what I said . . . is that I was having a moment of compassion for her.

Queen's feeling of compassion for Cowgirl inspired Queen to interject humor into the conversation. Others simply described their feelings as part of the overall humor production experience. For example, Bob recalls feeling offended by an external law firm's behavior, but he does not attribute his decision to interject humor to this feeling:

> Lisa: Anything else that you remember about this moment?
>
> Bob: Maybe it's a little bit offensive for them to do that kind of stuff.

Regardless of whether feelings served as triggers or existed as part of a more general experience, dividing them into six elements allows me to discuss

them in an organized manner: negative feelings attributed to an external source, negative feelings attributed to internal source, neutral feelings, positive feelings attributed to an external source, positive feelings attributed to internal source, and a sense of others' feelings (see Figure 4.5).

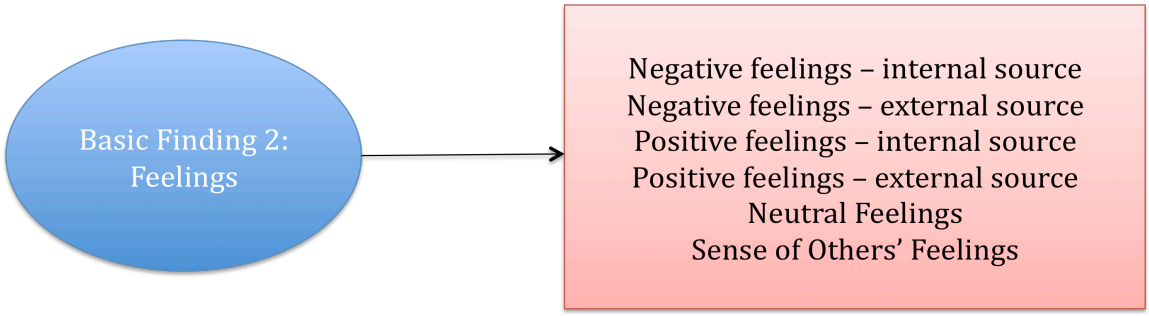

Figure 4.5. Basic finding 2: Most humor producers were consciously aware of certain feelings when they initiated humor.

Negative feelings attributed to external source. Some participants described having negative feelings that were caused by something or someone external to themselves. When Katie (a teacher at the elementary school) interjected humor, she remembered feeling attacked and criticized. Cowgirl, Katie's boss, had suggested that all teachers needed to incorporate more critical thinking activities into their curricula, and Katie interpreted the suggestion as a condemnation of teachers' current performance:

> Katie: I think it feels like an attack--as if we weren't doing it already. I guess that's where that comes from. It's just kind of, it kind of felt like, you know, an attack of sorts, I guess.

Katie identified her feeling as "attacked," but indirectly, she was expressing frustration with her boss. Frustration – especially frustration toward a boss--was

the most frequently expressed negative feeling attributed to an external source. For example, when interjecting humor, Xena remembered feeling frustrated that her boss Charlie sometimes does not back her up:

> Xena: I don't always feel like I get that managerial support when I've got other departments coming to me for things. I mean [it] always seems like there's a lot of lip service and no follow-through . . . and it is frustrating. It is frustrating.

Negative feelings attributed to internal source. Some participants described negative feelings that were more internally-oriented. For example, Anna interjected humor as the team was trying to find a date and time for the office holiday party. Anna felt behind in her work and was also helping to plan her daughter's wedding that would take place during the holiday season. She says that she felt exhausted and overwhelmed:

> Anna: And so I was just feeling really overwhelmed, like how am I gonna do what I need to do between now and the middle of December? I just didn't want to . . . I felt at the moment I didn't have the luxury of assigning any amount of time to such a frivolous thing.

Although the stressors causing Anna to feel overwhelmed existed outside of her, Anna talked about her inability to balance all of her commitments as a personal weakness and inner struggle.

Cowgirl also described feeling upset with herself when she interjected humor. Earlier that week, she had missed an appointment with her real estate agent:

> Cowgirl: And I felt *terrible* about it. I mean, I've thought about it all week. That man, he called on my answering machine. We were meeting at four o'clock, and I never forget *anything*.

Neutral. Some participants, like Grey, remembered a sense of "feeling" in the moment of humor production but described their feelings as normal or typical. As Grey stated, "I just felt normal."

Positive feelings attributed to external source. Participants also experienced positive feelings during humor production. Shawn indicated that his warm feelings about his work group allowed him to feel comfortable interjecting humor:

> Shawn: Whether I felt comfortable. I mean, if I was sitting with [a different group of people] I probably wouldn't have said things like that, but I felt comfortable around the group doing it, so.

Marc also identified his positive feelings as a trigger to humor production. He loves drawing names for the office's Secret Santa gift exchange each year, and when the portion of the meeting designated for this activity arose, he was very excited:

> Marc: We've got to do the name drawing, and I was real excited about it, and I'm excited about it every year.

Positive feelings attributed to internal source. While Marc and Shawn (as well as other participants) attributed their positive feelings to an entity outside of themselves at the time of humor production, some participants remember experiencing a generalized positive feeling that they did not attribute to an external source. For example, Carmen indicated that she was primed to produce humor during the staff meeting because she was feeling especially happy that day:

> Carmen: I was also a little more casual . . . [and] more relaxed that day

than usual.

Sense of others' feelings. Several participants indicated that the feelings they experienced during humor production emerged because of feelings they sensed others were having. For example, when Jim produced humor, he was keenly aware of his teammates' feelings of uneasiness, especially Magnum's:

> Jim: I sensed that like with Magnum I don't think she had heard about the shooting or somebody had not heard about it and there was a little bit of uneasiness.

Similarly, Len was tuned into his employee's feelings. He indicated that his sense of Sarah's feelings triggered his interjection of humor:

> Len: I could tell Sarah was not being real excited to be there.

Comments about basic finding 2. The process of identifying the elements for Basic Finding 2 unfolded very differently from the process of identifying the elements of external cues for Basic Finding 1. Within Basic Finding 1, elements emerged organically based on the content of participants' comments – different types of external cues seemed to recur and cluster together naturally. However, with Basic Finding 2, almost every flavor of feeling was represented within the data, and I could have created several different elemental structures. I created elements to organize data representing a full range of diverse feelings that did not automatically "hang together." A conscious awareness of feelings during humor production appears to be a common experience, but the nature of these feelings seems to be individually and contextually determined. The feelings an individual experiences in a given situation are unique that that person and the

specific characteristics of that moment. In addition, some participants experienced feelings as triggers to humor production while others did not.

Basic Finding 3: Most humor producers were consciously aware of thoughts when they initiated humor. Again, a connection exists between Basic Finding 1 and this finding. The external cues of basic finding 1 often led directly to the thoughts producers describe in basic finding 3 (see Figure 4.3). Only two participants indicated that they did not remember what they were thinking when they produced humor. Generally, participants' thoughts clustered into six different elements (see Figure 4.6); I will describe each element below. Similar to the findings about feelings, some participants identified their thoughts as triggers to humor production (see Erma's quote below in the "another situation" element). Others described their thoughts as one part of the overall humor production experience (see Katie's quote below in the "things I dislike" element).

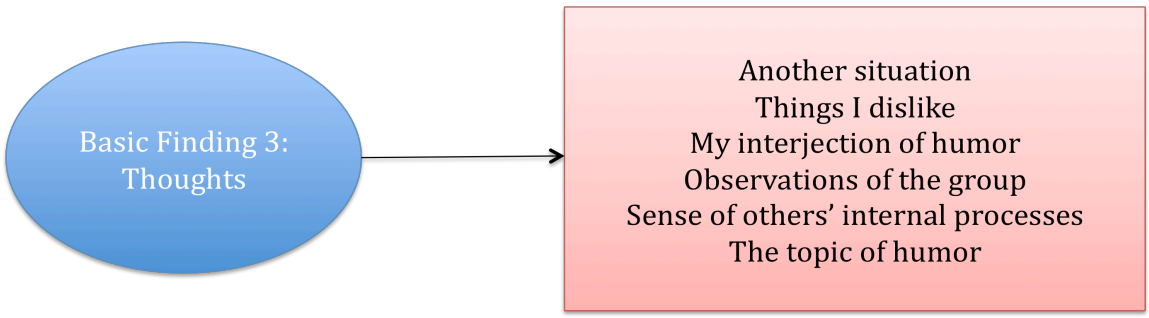

Figure 4.6. Basic finding 3: Most humor producers were consciously aware of thoughts when they initiated humor.

Another situation. Several participants indicated that when they produced humor, they were thinking about a situation other than the current focus of discussion. Usually, the immediate topic of conversation sparked thoughts of

this "other situation" that held associations for the participant. At the staff meeting of the elementary school teachers, for instance, Queen shared a story about her struggles to work with a difficult student named Nomi. Queen's description caused Erma to think about problem children with whom she had personally worked in her own classroom, and this thought, in turn, motivated her to produce humor:

> Erma: I was specifically thinking of individual children that are troublesome, and Queen certainly has that issue. And that issue just keyed the response.

Things I dislike. Other participants recalled thinking about their personal dislikes as they produced humor. During another portion of the elementary school teachers' meeting, the principal Cowgirl read the script of a project proposal she had submitted as part of graduate course assignment. The script was rather long and included lofty, academic language. Katie indicated that throughout Cowgirl's recitation, she was thinking "I hate when people have to read things like that." This thought led Katie to create humor. Similarly, Grey indicated that he has never liked staff meetings and was thinking about how boring they are when he interjected humor:

> Grey: I think all of us, nobody likes staff meetings, and they would probably tell you I do this on a pretty regular basis. I just try to lighten it up a little bit.

My interjection of humor. Some participants experienced meta-thinking about the very humor they were interjecting as they produced it. For example, as she produced humor, Magnum evaluated the humorousness of her missed

opportunity for communication with her out-of-state colleague and decided that the episode was funny:

> Magnum: I mean I suppose *I* thought it was funny that she didn't get to talk to me and I thought others would think it was funny.

Shawn indicated that his only thoughts during one instance of humor production focused on the humor interjection itself:

> Shawn: Gosh, I don't know that I had any [thought] other than just hoping they thought it was funny.

Observations of the group. Occasionally, participants consciously considered their knowledge of their work group as they produced humor. Sarah reported that the synagogue staff had a habit of getting lost in the details, and she was thinking about this dynamic as she produced humor:

> Sarah: I think sometimes we get accused of--within ourselves--of over-thinking things, and so I think I was kind of playing on that in a kind of segue to say, "Let's move on, let's not get caught up in these details."

Shawn was thinking about his group's typically serious behavior when he interjected humor:

> Shawn: We never get to hear anything about the funnier side of the things that we do, so it is always so serious. So, I think that's pretty much what was going through my mind.

Sense of others' internal processes. Many participants reported thinking about what was going on internally within their fellow group members. Because this element is so rich and plentiful, I present several examples below that illustrate the range of responses. Some participants recall thinking about what their teammates "knew" as they produced humor. Mary Pat, for example, felt

comfortable interjecting humor about chocolate pies because she was confident that everyone knew she loves chocolate:

> Mary Pat: And, of course, I love chocolate, and everybody *knows* that I love chocolate and so I was just making a point about that maybe we should get a chocolate pie.

Similarly, Charlie joked that the executive team of the company would be scared when he told them he had to leave an important meeting in order to have a conversation with the "company shrink." He was confident that his team would find the joke funny because he "knew" they were aware of the dysfunction that exists at every level of the company:

> Charlie: They all kind of recognize that there's some level of crazy sort of at all different parts of this organization.

At another point in the same meeting, when Charlie told his team that he would be out of the office on vacation for a few days, Nancy commented humorously that his staff was going to goof off and party while he was gone. She described her thoughts as she produced this humor:

> Nancy: Because with him [Charlie], he knows we're busting our butts whether he's here or not and so I can joke about it and act like we're gonna be partying when he's not here.

Nancy was confident about Charlie's knowledge of his team – that he knew they were hard workers and would not neglect their work while he was away from the office.

In addition to pondering their teammates' knowledge bases, some participants claimed to be aware of their teammates' thoughts in the moments of humor production. As she discussed the elementary school's low scores on the

listening section of a standardized test, Queen observed her group's body language. She "knew" that their averted gazes indicated they thought their classes were responsible for the low scores:

> Queen: People were looking down. They thought they were the only ones that had bad scores.

When interjecting humor about external counsel (Zelma), Bob assumed that he, his colleague Jim, and his supervisor Magnum were experiencing similar thoughts:

> Bob: I kind of feel like Jim was thinking a lot like what I was thinking, and Magnum probably felt the same way because they've been bombarded [in the past]. If something like that comes up, Zelma always does this.

The topic of humor. Participants also frequently reported thinking about the topic of humor or issue about which they were creating humor. Sometimes these thoughts emerged as reflections on the current situation. For example, at the end of the real estate company staff meeting, I asked Andy when he would be available to meet with me. At that point in the process, Andy did not know the topic of my study, and the team had been joking around about what I might be studying. In response to my question, Andy replied in a humorous tone, "No, no! I was *good*!" Later during our IPR interview, Andy explained that he thought I only needed to meet with two of his colleagues, so he was surprised by my request for time with him. He recounted this thought:

> Andy: I *really* thought that you had only said you needed to speak with those two.

Thus, Andy's thoughts in the moment of humor production were a reassessment

of the current situation about which he created and communicated humor – the fact that he, like his colleagues, had exhibited the behavior I was studying and was invited to participate in an interview. He further elaborated on his thoughts, including a recounting of his self-talk in the moment:

> Andy: I just remember thinking . . . it was sort of an "Oh-no, what have I, what did I say?"

Recollections of self-talk about the topic of humor were not unique to Andy. Anna recalled her group's discussion about trying to find a date for the office holiday party as well as her conversation with herself in the moment of producing humor:

> Anna: Everybody was looking at calendars, and I think we were talking about the 4th, which was that next day. And I started thinking about the 3rd and the fact that we have all of those hours from noon until the open house starts where we're just kind of milling around and cleaning. I thought, "That might make sense."

A couple of participants experienced their thoughts about the topic of humor as flashbacks. Lamont interjected humor about his colleague Marc's obsession with Christmas:

> Lamont: I just had that flashback … Nothing in particular, I just had that flashback of Marc and Christmas and July.

Magnum thought back to a picture she had seen of a shooting suspect, the person about whom she interjected humor:

> Magnum: Um, I had a vision of the mug shot and thinking, well, of course this person stood out. He doesn't look like a [university] student.

Comments about Basic Finding 3. Participants are generally aware of the same types (or elements) of thoughts during humor production. A pattern that

emerges across the different elements within Basic Finding 3 is (1) an awareness of the current situation immediately followed by (2) thoughts an individual personally associates with that situation. For example, Erma is fully present to Queen's story of a difficult student – the story being recounted in the current situation. Then Erma's thoughts immediately flow to her *own* experiences with other problem students that are similar to Queen's – thoughts she personally associated with Queen's story. Similarly, Mary Pat was actively involved in a discussion about what food to serve at the group's next meeting when her mind segued to her own desire for chocolate. Sarah was engaged in her team's debate about how to deal with overflow seating at a fundraising event when her thoughts turned to her memories of other, related unproductive team interactions. Thus, participants tend to experience the same types of thoughts *in a similar sequence* during humor production.

Situational details. The three Basic Findings above do not encompass all of the experiences of which participants were consciously aware during humor production. They also reported an awareness of situational details that were not connected to humor production itself. For example, Andy remembers the events that took place immediately before I asked him to schedule an IPR interview:

> Andy: Honestly, right before you said that I had gotten up and gone to get an apple or something.

Clearly, Andy was aware of what he was doing in the moment before interjecting humor; however, he does not connect his getting up from the table to fetch food with the production of humor. I coded instances such as this one (in which

participants recalled situational details that did not directly illuminate their experiences of humor production) but did not analyze them in depth. These data are outside the scope of the current study.

Border between "conscious experience" and "latent but reflexively accessible."

Basic Finding 4: Most humor producers had specific intentions when they interjected humor, even if they were not conscious of them at the time. As I explained in Chapter 2, the spontaneous humor that is the focus of this study is by definition intentional (as opposed to accidental). Producers' intentions may be premeditated or relatively unconscious and instantaneous, and differentiating between the two types is difficult. First, participants often were not explicit in identifying their intentions as "conscious" versus "latent but available upon reflection." Second, sometimes participants' intentions appeared to emerge as they were producing humor, progressing from latent to conscious as they spoke. For example, Jim describes his internal experience as he decided to produce humor. He claims that initially he did not intend to be humorous but changed his mind mid-story when he realized that he wanted (intended) his audience laugh and relax:

> Lisa: And did you think consciously about delivering that message in a humorous way before you started to talk?
> Jim: Not *initially,* but about halfway through I figured that it would be good to provide some kind of levity to get people laughing and maybe feel a little bit safer about going.

Instead of trying to force Basic Finding 4 into the subcategory of "conscious" or "latent but reflexively accessible," I place it where it naturally seems to fall--on the border between the two (see Figure 4.3).

Basic findings 2 and 3 are linked to Basic finding 4; participants' thoughts and feelings generally led them to arrive at an intention for producing humor (see Figure 4.3). These intentions generally fell into four elements (see Figure 4.7). Only two participants indicated that they were not sure what they intended when they produced humor.

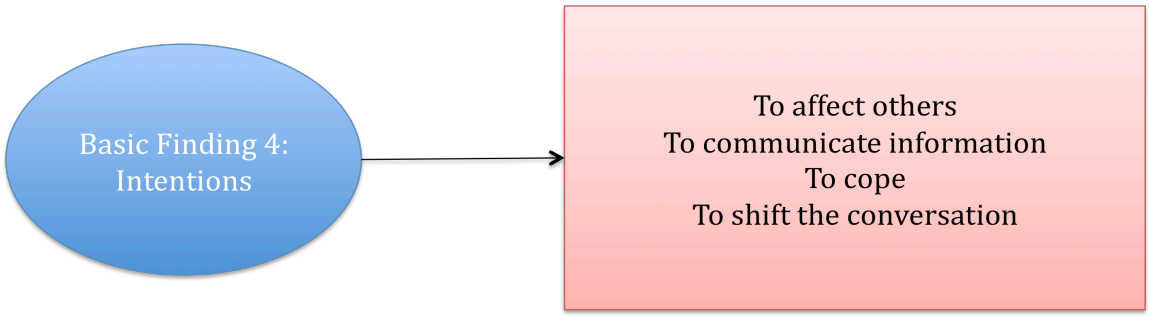

Figure 4.7. Basic finding 4: Most humor producers had specific intentions when they interjected humor, even if they were not conscious of them at the time.

To affect others. Many participants interjected humor in hopes of affecting or changing others' external behaviors or internal experiences. For example, some focused on *affecting others' decisions*. Anna indicated that her goal in interjecting humor was to influence her team's decision about planning a holiday party, "I didn't want to have a staff party!" She used a humorous tone to suggest that maybe the team should forgo the party, hoping that someone might take her recommendation seriously. Mary Pat also hoped to sway her team's decision

when she produced humor. She wanted to make sure that her personal dessert preferences were honored at an upcoming meeting:

> Mary Pat: This has to do with just trying to ensure that we--and seriously--that we get enough pies.

Other participants hoped their humorous contributions would *lead others to enact a specific behavior*. Lauren, the Executive Director of the medical support non-profit organization, explained that she did not have money in her budget to provide financial incentives to her employees, so the organization has a tradition of participating in a fun activity during months that include five Fridays. Her employee Devin had complained that the team had neglected this tradition twice over the past year. Lauren was excited that the team had gone to breakfast together the previous Friday and produced humor in hopes that Devin would revoke her earlier complaints:

> Lauren: I just wanted Devin to at least acknowledge that she had a fun Fifth Friday Fun day.

Jim also hoped that his humor would lead to a particular behavior. Specifically, he hoped that the group would spend more time conversing:

> Jim: [I was] sort of trying to keep the conversation going with our group. Sometimes we don't get to talk together a lot, but if people are laughing, if we can keep talking and laughing and telling jokes, people will stick around for a little while longer and get to interact.

Some participants used humor in hopes of *altering others' feelings*. Andy interjected humor in order to make people feel more relaxed:

> Andy: I just feel that it's a way to make people comfortable in the situation and with me.

Grey was worried that the remote portion of his team would be upset that they were not invited to a local social event. He produced humor in hopes of preventing this reaction:

> Grey: It was the feeling that probably humor would help them feel not offended for being forgotten about on this thing.

Still other participants used humor in hopes of *controlling others' perceptions*. Natalie produced humor in order to create two different impressions; she wanted her team to know (1) that her committee was not rigid and (2) that she was personally very likable:

> Natalie: That was what motivated me to do that. Just to show that we weren't rigid, you know. We didn't have any plans, [and] it's okay. And, again, the attempt for you to like me. I'm gonna be funny, you know.

Alana interpreted her boss' public reminder that she submit a vacation form as an insult. She had already requested her vacation time verbally and had told Len that she would follow up with a formal document. She responded to Len with a humorous quip, hoping that he would remember that he did not need to reprimand her – that she is dependable and trustworthy:

> Alana: I want him to take away that he knows I'm gonna do what I'm supposed to do, because I've pretty much already always done it.

To communicate information. The intention participants cited most frequently was the desire to communicate information. The types of information producers wanted to convey varied widely. Some hoped to *communicate their feelings.* When Len announced that all of his employees would receive a substantial holiday bonus, Lana responded with humor:

> Lana: Actually, I was shocked at first when he said how much it was. I'm like, "They're actually going to do this," you know. I was actually surprised that they [were] actually considering giving us a gift because they never have in the past.

Lana used humor to convey her feeling of pleasant surprise at Len's announcement.

Often, participants produced humor to make a point or *to send a message.* During the synagogue staff meeting, Len reported that the organization had not yet reached its fundraising goals. Although only two major fundraisers were on the calendar, it was likely that the staff would have to help with an additional event. Len delivered this message through humor and explained:

> Len: That was an attempt to--in light of what's probably going to be a bad situation--that we're not gonna make hardly anything on this. And then you're looking at a second one [fundraiser], trying to make it humorous; like, it looks like we're gonna have to have another fundraiser.

When Charlie suggested that Andy treat a difficult client nicely, Andy responded humorously to indicate his ambivalence about his boss' advice:

> Andy: Charlie said, "Just say it in a nice way," and I was saying, "Yeah, I *may* say it in a nice way, or I *may not* so much with the nice."

Charlie was sending a message to his boss – "I may take your advice, but I may not." Some participants used humor to send a specific type of message – that *they knew what others were thinking or feeling*. Andy made a sarcastic remark about another department within the company. When I asked him what he was trying to communicate to he group with this comment, he replied, "Um, probably what they already knew." Andy assumed that the rest of the team recognized how difficult it was to work with the other department and, therefore, would

understand his humorous interjection. While Andy was confident he knew what his *entire* team was thinking, Nancy sensed *one particular* colleague's inner struggle. Nancy interjected humor in hopes of communicating a message she thought Xena was too reticent to share on her own:

> Nancy: It's to get that information. A lot of times Xena won't; if something has frustrated her, she shuts down about it. She doesn't talk about it. She won't tell him, and he needs to know about it.

Nancy knew that an internal customer was giving Xena a very hard time and that Charlie (their boss) was unaware of the situation. She hoped her joke about the customer's behavior would clue Charlie in to Xena's challenge.

To cope. Some participants produced humor during stressful moments or during discussions about upsetting topics. Erma explained that such humor helps her team cope when they are discussing difficult students:

> Erma: It's too heavy if you carry it with you 24/7, and most of us do. You can't really function . . . [and] sometimes it's just good to laugh about it because that's better than literally beating your head.

Natalie uses humor to cope with an issue that is troubling to her personally. She is constantly aware that she is much older than her colleagues and worries that this prevents her from fitting in:

> Natalie: Age is an issue, so I probably would make a joke of it to make it not be so hurtful for me to be 70.

To shift the conversation. At times, participants consciously used humor to shift the tone or focus of the conversation. For example, when Shawn sensed that the meeting was getting boring, he decided to produce humor:

> Shawn: I guess I was trying to add some humor to the meeting because it

seemed kind of dry up 'til that point.

Len's team was lamenting their obligation to attend a fundraising event on a Saturday night. Len explained how he mentally traced the verbal exchanges amongst his team members, noted that the conversation was headed in an unproductive direction, and attempted to shift the focus with humor:

> Len: He makes the idea, which is not good. She jumps in and says, "I'll be part of it." I make another joke to wrap it all around and say, "You know what? We'll all be there. We'll have a good time, you know."

Comments about Basic Finding 4. The interview excerpts above each illustrate a single element of Basic Finding 4: to affect others, to communicate information, to cope, or to shift the conversation. However, participants often indicated that they had multiple intentions when producing humor. For example, Jim told his team a story about a purse snatching that took place in his hometown. He ended the story humorously, explaining that the police shot the criminal and, thus, "we haven't had a purse snatching in a long time." In his IPR interview, Jim explained that he produced this humor for several reasons--to keep the conversation going (to shift the conversation), to calm members of the group who were worried about attending a program at a university where there had recently been a robbery (to affect others' feelings), to motivate his colleagues to attend the educational program (to affect others' behavior), to influence his colleagues' perception of him (to affect others' perceptions), and to express support for his supervisor who was coordinating the program (to communicate information).

Latent but reflexively accessible experience. Some of the experiences participants described during IPR interviews were present beneath the surface in the moment of humor production and emerged into consciousness only upon reflection. Nancy described the nature of "latent but reflexively accessible experiences" during her IPR interview:

> Nancy: It's funny how all that is going through my mind, and I don't even notice that it's going through my mind.

The IPR interview enabled participants like Nancy to surface some of the experiences that were going through their minds when they produced humor even though they weren't consciously aware of those experiences in that moment.

As participants attempted to retrieve these experiences, an interesting pattern emerged. Participants often engaged in dialectic with themselves, initially (1) claiming not to recall additional experiences in the moment of humor production, (2) pausing to reflect, (3) deciding that they did remember something, and (4) then surfacing rich recollections. They frequently used "filler words" such as "I don't know" or "I don't remember" immediately followed by an explanation of what they *did* know or remember. For example, consider the excerpt from Mary Pat's IPR interview below. Initially, Mary Pat indicates emphatically that she does not know what motivated her to be funny. Then, she pauses to think. Upon reflection, she remembers feeling very comfortable in the moment that she interjected humor – so comfortable that she was sure her

comment would not fail. She is also reports an underlying belief that "nobody wants to be a dud" with humor:

> Lisa: What in this moment motivated that desire to want to be funny?
>
> Mary Pat: I really don't know. I don't think that I could--it was just a subconscious thing. [pause] A, a, um, a very, you know, feeling of comfortableness that . . . this is not going to be a dud. You know, nobody wants to be a dud, especially with humor.

Similarly, Andy initially claims that he does not recall much about the moment he interjected humor. He then proceeds to provide rich detail about the organizational dynamics that influenced his humor production. Notice that in addition to claiming that he doesn't know what he was experiencing, he uses many additional filler words such as "um," "ah," and "you know" which extend the time available for him to think:

> Andy: Um, I don't know. I don't know what I was feeling. [pause] Um, this, this whole, ah, little interplay, um, has a deep sort of background here, and a deeper story. We are finding ourselves, the legal department, more and more, and maybe all of the departments, I'm not sure, you know, things have been rough for the past year or two. Um, and I think that some of the departments internally have, um, sort of circled, I don't know, circled the wagons a bit and, you know, are a little more isolated and protective.

Basic Finding 5: Upon reflection, most participants were aware of context when producing humor. Participants were generally aware of three different elements of the context when producing humor – group dynamics, history, and the relational context (See Figure 4.8).

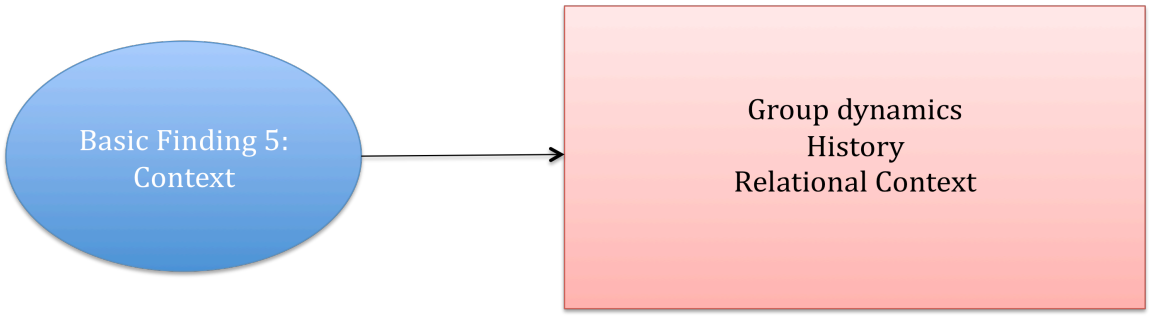

Figure 4.8. Basic finding 5: Upon reflection, some participants were aware of context when producing humor.

Group dynamics. Some participants indicated that their understanding of typical internal group dynamics affected their production of humor. Carmen was especially aware of her group's norms regarding the use of crude humor during staff meetings:

> Carmen: It's generally okay to do that. And even in staff meetings here, as long as you're not completely taking over the meeting. As long as you're not being *ridiculously* crude, you can be a little crude.

Nancy recalls being aware of the team's cohesiveness:

> Nancy: We are a good team. I mean we have our own, you know, it's like a family. We tend to pull together and work very well together as a team.

Other participants reported an awareness of *organizational-level dynamics*. Andy recalls being cognizant of the "us against them" mentality that currently exists when he contributed a sarcastic remark about his interaction with another department within his company:

> Andy: I think that some of the departments internally have sort of circled the wagons a bit and are a little more isolated and protective.

Bob's familiarity with the current leaders of his organization led him to feel comfortable interjecting humor about Zelma, a firm that serves as external counsel to the company:

> Bob: Well, in the, our current executives are not gonna . . . jump on the phone and get onto us, or call Grey and say, "Why aren't you all handling this?" In the past, some of our previous executives would have blasted us for not knowing about it or not communicating with Zelma first before they called us.

History. Several participants indicated that their knowledge of organizational, group, or interpersonal history colored their production of humor. Cowgirl indicated that she purposefully adopted a humorous style instead of a serious one when giving directions to her team because of her *past relationships* with them:

> Cowgirl: If I had just had this job and walked in one day as a principal and had never been friends with these people or gone out with them, I maybe wouldn't be that way.

Anna recalled some recent history – a *previous communication* with her boss--when interjecting humor about planning a staff holiday party. Anna knew that Lauren (her boss) was aware of her over-burdened schedule and thought Lauren would understand her desire to combine the staff party with the office open house:

> Anna: That was right on the heels of a conversation Lauren and I had yesterday morning before that meeting--shortly before it--about my assistant who has been out for over a month.

A history of *recurrent patterns* also informed some participants' humor production. Lauren was aware of Anna's past behavior patterns when she interjected humor about Anna's tendency to withdraw into herself:

> Lauren: Anna, she always sits in the back. She never sits around the table. She used to sit on the floor when we met in the other office. Yeah, it's really weird. But that's just how she is. She doesn't want to get too involved. She always wants to be just a little bit further back than

everybody else.

When Charlie interjected humor about a frustrating colleague in another department, he recalls being aware of his team's recurrent pattern of poor communications with that area:

> Charlie: It's on the surface all the time. It is something that Andy and I talk about everyday.

Similarly, Erma was thinking about her own repetitive experiences with a particular student when she produced humor about Queen's frustrations with the same individual:

> Erma: The reason why I made that statement is that Corey and I had Nomi the first year I was here, and our experience was chasing Nomi constantly.

Relational context. Upon reflection, participants also reported an awareness of the nature of their relationships with the people who were the subject of or the audience to their humor. For example, Alana was aware of her evolving relationship with Len (her boss) when she humorously told him that she was planning to take vacation during the Christmas holiday:

> Alana: We've gotten actually a better relationship with each other. It's kind of a tit for tat kind of thing. I will kind of give back to him when he gives back to me.

Queen explained that her long-term relationship with her boss Cowgirl influenced her decision to interject humor that played off one of Cowgirl's comments:

> Queen: We've known each other a long time. There were a lot of *really*

> serious people there and just by nature--like Cowgirl's very serious in her role with us, but in general we're not serious people at all.

Lamont's relationship with Marc – and his awareness of other team members' relationships with Marc--influenced his decision to interject humor *about* Marc.

> Lamont: Like Marc eats all day long. He eats *all* day long. If there's something in the back, he is eating all day long. And I get on him all the time, "Marc, you eat all day long!" He's, "I can't help it," but he doesn't put on any weight, you know. Marc will come in and he's just like, "Well, I just don't want to be here," and then the next minute he's, "Oh, what are gonna do today?" He's just--he's a *character* around here.

Similarly, Shawn was aware of both his own and others' relationships with Mike when he interjected humor about him:

> Shawn: Mike used to be the boss, so, before Grey.
>
> Lisa: So is there something about that fact that makes the comment funnier?
>
> Shawn: I think they've all had relationships with Mike. Just different ways as being the boss, so. I don't know, I guess I maybe thought they would some humor in that.

Comments about Basic Finding 5. As with previous basic findings, Basic Finding 5 emphasizes the highly contextual nature of spontaneous humor. The contextual elements of which participants recall being aware during humor production would, for the most part, not be obvious to an outsider. Someone who does not know the group and its players well would not be aware of the group's dynamics, its history, or the nature of its internal and external relationships. For example, without knowing that Cowgirl's employees used to be her peers, one would not suspect that this past relationship influenced her choice to interject humor. And without knowing that Anna has an intense work

ethic and normally holds herself apart from the group, one probably would not understand why it was funny for Lauren to humorously tell Anna that she'd "better not still be at the office!" The experiences of which participants recall being aware upon reflection are highly individualized and distinct for each team.

Basic Finding 6: Upon reflection, some participants were aware of tacit assumptions that affected their production of humor. Tacit assumptions are the unique, underlying beliefs, developed as a result of past experiences, that steer individuals' decision-making and behavior. Participants did not "speak" these tacit assumptions to themselves consciously during humor production; rather, as they reflected upon their experiences, they put words to these assumptions and explained how they affected their humor (See Figure 4.9).

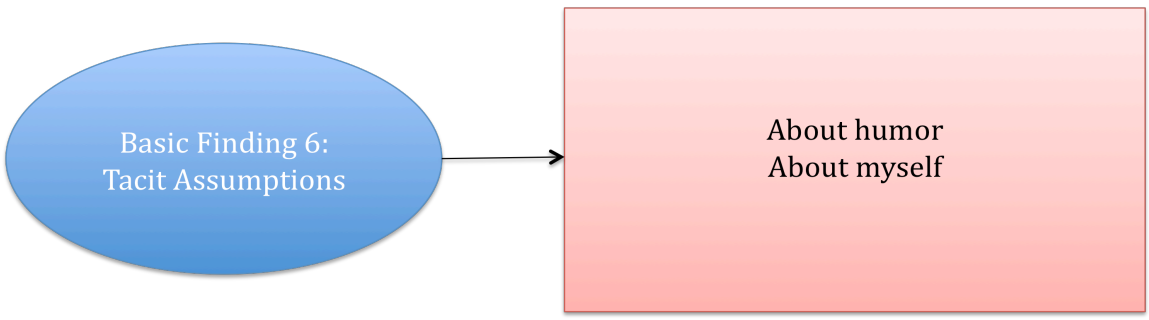

Figure 4.9. Basic finding 6: Upon reflection, some participants were aware of tacit assumptions that guided their production of humor.

About humor. Participants reported many tacit assumptions about the *general effects of humor* itself. Some of these assumptions include: humor bonds the group together; humor reduces focus; humor denotes a comfortable level; humor equalizes relationships; humor is a roundabout way of making a point; humor is an essential coping mechanism; humor leads to better relationships.

Below, Alana explained her tacit assumption that humor is a non-confrontational way of addressing a tough issue:

> Alana: To me that's more confrontational. The humor is *not*. It's more the soft, kind of cutesy way of doing it.

Based on this belief, Alana chose to express her displeasure about her boss' inquiry into her vacation plans using humor – as opposed to telling him directly that she was offended by his public questioning.

Marc was guided by the assumption that humor makes staff meetings bearable:

> Marc: We have lots of humor at staff meetings. It makes 'em sort of the one thing that I look forward to, one of the reasons why they're bearable.

Thus, part of the reason Marc interjected humor into the group's conversation was because he believed humor was expected and desirable at staff meetings.

Several participants described tacit assumptions that encompassed not only their own beliefs about humor but also *others' beliefs about humor*. For instance Jim stated, "I think everybody senses the value of humor." His teammate Mary Pat assumed that "nobody wants to be a dud, especially with humor." Nancy believed that her teammates all value humor, but "we don't want to go over the top!" These participants' tacit assumptions about their teammates' beliefs influenced the way they used humor. For example, Jim felt free to interject humor because he assumed everyone appreciated its value, and Nancy produced many instances of humor because she knew her teammates would enjoy it, but she tempered her comments appropriately.

About myself. Many of the tacit assumptions participants shared had to do with their beliefs about themselves. For instance, several people indicated that they typically use humor. When asked to reflect on her reasons for using humor in a particular situation, Anna stated, "that's how I usually deal with things." Nancy's response mirrored Anna's:

> Nancy: Humor is really my lifeline. I mean, that's kind of how I communicate.

And Cowgirl's explanation was somewhat similar:

> Cowgirl: I'm not one of those whiny people, but I'll laugh or make jokes about it.

Other participants reported tacit assumptions about themselves that did not concern humor. One of Carmen's tacit assumptions was that she tended to talk more than she should during meetings. She was aware of this tacit assumption when she interjected humor:

> Carmen: Sometimes I *do* have a tendency to talk over everyone. Sometimes I do kind of take over the meeting. Not usually the big meeting; usually our smaller meeting.

Carmen's humorous remark poked fun at herself for having shared her full report with her teammates before it was formally her turn to do so.

Comments about Basic Finding 6. Participants indicated that tacit assumptions shaped their humor production. Although many participants held assumptions about humor and about themselves, each individual's unique perspective determined the nature of those assumptions as well as how the assumption manifested in a given situation. A person who believed that humor

reduced focus, for instance, was likely to judge a time sensitive decision-making process as inappropriate for humor while another individual who believed that humor moved a conversation along would judge that same situation as being *ripe* for humor.

Another interesting finding within Basic Finding 6 is the common claim that "humor is characteristic of me"--that humor is simply how I communicate in general. At first glance, this tacit assumption appears to contrast with data about the contextual nature of spontaneous humor. If participants use humor regardless of context, simply because it is a mode of communication that is typical for them, perhaps context is not as important as other data suggest. However, an individual pattern of humorous communication and the contextual nature of that behavior appear to complement one another. Even participants who claim that humor is characteristic of them make choices about when and how to employ humor based on the current context. The IPR interview with Queen illustrates this concept. Initially, Queen attributed her interjection of humor to her tacit assumption that humor is a typical mode of communication for her:

> Lisa: What let you know in that moment [that] using a lighter tone there would be an effective way to communicate?
>
> Queen: I've *always* communicated that way, and plus I do that with my kids in my classroom.

Then, only two sentences later, she explained that her tendency to use humor frequently was far from the only influence on her interjection of humor. Multiple

contextual elements influenced her:

> Queen: I didn't want them to feel uptight and feel like they were the only ones. And I knew that because I know this staff very well. They got quiet, and they looked down. So, I was like, okay, they think I'm talking about them personally, and I *wasn't*.

Queen was aware of sensory cues in the form of the teachers' silence and body language (looking down). She interjected humor based on her sense of others' thoughts – her sense that the teachers thought she was talking about them personally. And she acted with a clear intention to assure the teachers that she was *not* talking about them personally.

Queen contributed five humor incidents during the elementary school teachers' meeting, evidence that her tacit assumption regarding her habitual use of humor was probably accurate. However, her IPR interview indicated that contextual variables of which she was consciously aware as well as those that were latent but reflexively available also influenced her production of humor.

Summary of Basic Findings

The basic findings of this study establish two subcategories that characterize spontaneous humor producers' "in the moment" experiences: "conscious experiences" and "latent but reflexively available experiences." Differentiating between these two subcategories clarifies what is actually going on for humor producers as they create and communicate humor. Producers are consciously aware of external cues, feelings, and thoughts but are only able to recall other aspects of their experience, such as context and tacit assumptions, upon reflection. Producers almost always act with intention. Sometimes they

are aware of this intention as they produce humor and, at other times, the intention becomes clear as they reflect upon their experience. Prior to this study, we suspected but did not possess evidence of humor producers' internal experiences. See Table 4.13 for a summary of the basic findings.

While the basic findings tell us "where to look" when examining spontaneous humor producers' experiences, they do not enable us to predict how a specific individual is likely to produce humor in a given situation. In fact, the findings emphasize how difficult it will be to establish such rules. The nature of the elements a particular individual will construe as conducive to humor are dependent on that person's characteristics and interpretation of the context.

Table 4.13.
Summary of Basic Findings

Division	Category	Subcategory	Type	Element
Core Findings	Basic Findings	Conscious Experience	External Cues	Verbal cues
				Sensory cues
				Combination (Meeting climate)
			Feelings	Negative feelings – internal source
				Negative feelings – external source
				Positive feelings – internal source
				Positive feelings – external source
				Neutral feelings
				Sense of others' feelings
			Thoughts	Another situation
				Things I dislike
				My interjection of humor
				Observations of the group
				Sense of others' internal processes
				The topic of humor
		Border	Intentions	To affect others
				To communicate information
				To cope
				To shift the conversation
		Latent but Reflexively Available	Context	Group dynamics
				History
				Relational context
			Tacit Assumptions	About humor
				About myself
	Themes			

Themes

While basic findings reveal the *types* of experiences humor producers are likely to have, the themes capture commonalities that exist *across the basic findings*.

Theme 1: Full engagement. Spontaneous humor producers are fully engaged in the current dynamics of the interaction. All of the experiences participants report having during humor production involve an acute awareness of the immediate situation. First, consider the experiences of which participants were consciously aware. Regardless of which specific cue captured a producer's attention, that cue was an element of actions taking place *in the current moment*. For example, Mary Pat had to be tuned into the current discussion in order to recognize that her team was involved in relaxed small talk – an external cue that indicated to her this was a good time for humor. She stated that she produced humor because she was aware that the group was just "sitting around and trying to figure out how many pounds of barbeque we need." Had Mary Pat been distracted from the group's current exchange, she would not have picked up on the cue that led to her humor. In addition, Mary Pat's comment would probably not have been funny – or may not have made sense – if she had waited to interject humor until the group had moved on to more serious topics. Mary Pat's full engagement in the group's dynamics *in the moment* was essential.

Following identification of an external cue, participants often became aware of a feeling. Again, this feeling was related to the immediate situation.

When Charlie interjected humor about potentially having to leave an executive meeting to keep an appointment with the "corporate shrink," he felt a strong connection between the immediate situation and other work in which he had recently been engaged:

> Charlie: I remember feeling, I can't even describe . . . I remember feeling some connection between this process and what I'm doing with [my executive coach].

Charlie was fully absorbed in the moment (the process of scheduling an interview with me), which allowed him to recognize that his current feelings were similar to those he experienced when working with his executive coach. These feelings led Charlie to contribute humor. Had he *not* been fully involved in the conversation, he would probably not have produced humor at that moment.

Also, as I reported earlier in this chapter, participants' thoughts during humor production began with an awareness of the current situation and then jumped to thoughts that the individual associated with that situation. Katie interjected humor after listening to her boss talk about the school's scores on a standardized test. Initially, Katie was fully tuned into her boss' comments about standardized testing. Then, her thoughts flowed to her distaste for standardized tests. This feeling of distaste, in turn, motivated Katie to produce humor:

> Katie: I don't like the standardized tests ,so I don't like when we have to talk about it [*sic*].

If Katie had not been fully tuned into the current conversation, she would not have picked up on an external cue (her boss' comments about standardized tests) or experienced the associated thought that spurred her humor production.

One example from the basic findings appears to contradict the theme that spontaneous humor producers are fully engaged in current interactional dynamics. Participants often thought about and evaluated their own interjections of humor before communicating them to others. Such meta-cognition involved a momentary focus on the self and, therefore, a withdrawal from the current situation. However, even these internally focused thoughts were grounded in the current situation. The individual was evaluating the likelihood that others would consider their comment to be funny *given the current dynamics*. For example, Magnum pondered her humorous comment before vocalizing it, drawing a conclusion about its appropriateness based on the immediate audience and topic of conversation:

> Magnum: I didn't think it was going to be *riotously* funny. Just, you know, cute. It *was* funny, and it was timely. It fit in with what we were talking about.

Magnum was confident that her humor would be funny *because it fit with the current topic of conversation*. Although at first glance, it may seem that meta-cognition about one's own humor would distract from the immediate situation, such thoughts are inextricably linked to current dynamics.

Participants' thoughts and feelings about the immediate situation directly influenced their intentions. At the beginning of the elementary school teachers'

meeting, several different conversations were taking place at once. Cowgirl sensed that the meeting climate was too casual (external cue) and thought about how much she disliked disorganized meetings (thought). As a result, she interjected humor with the intention of altering her employees' behavior: "I did it to get their attention," she explained. Cowgirl's sense of the current situation set off this quick cascade of internal experiences that led to humor production. Again, had she *not* been tuned into the dynamics of the interaction around her, she could not have produced spontaneous humor at that moment.

Entrenchment in the current interactional dynamics characterizes those experiences that were latent but reflexively available as well. For example, Basic Finding 5 indicates that context often influenced participants' experiences of humor production. Interestingly, even when participants reported the importance of *historical* context, it was the relevance of that history *to the current situation* that affected their humor production. Bob explained that he knew his coworkers would enjoy his humor about scud missiles because they shared a common history; they all worked for the company during a time when joking about scud missiles was rampant. Bob's full engagement in the moment enabled him to consciously make a connection between Grey's comments about external counsel's behavior and the behavior of scud missiles. Upon reflection, he also recalled making a quick assessment of the current relational context. His knowledge of audience enabled him to estimate their potential receptiveness to his humor:

> Bob: We were all working up here together, Mary Pat and Mike and Jim and I during all this, in the '90's with the first--all the jokes about the scud missiles and stuff like that.

Even the application of tacit assumptions, underlying beliefs that endure across many situations, depended upon a participant's full engagement in current dynamics. An awareness of the immediate situation enabled an individual to retrieve and pay attention to the appropriate assumption. Andy explained that he interjected humor as a way to "put myself on the chopping block to get cut up a little bit by the group." He had mistakenly assumed that he did not need to participate in an IPR interview and wanted to redeem himself for this misstep. Although he was not conscious of his internal process in the moment of producing humor, upon reflection, Andy realized that he held a tacit assumption that making fun of himself was the best way to ease his working relationship with colleagues:

> Andy: I feel like it's easier to work with folks when you can sort of be on that level, and be comfortable on that level. And the easiest way to get there is to make fun of myself generally.

Andy had to be fully engaged in the group's current interpersonal dynamics to recognize that he needed to practice some quick impression management. In turn, he was able to retrieve a tacit assumption about behavior that was likely to accomplish this goal.

As I reviewed the study data for this section of Chapter 4, I searched for a negative case that represented an exception to this theme. However, I could not find an instance in which the humor producer was not clearly engaged in the

dynamics of the current situation. This theme emerged consistently across all of the basic findings.

Theme 2: Interpersonal sensitivity. Sensitivity to others' thoughts and feelings plays a significant role in spontaneous humor production. In addition to being tuned into the immediate situation, many humor producers were especially focused on or sensitive to others' current thoughts and feelings. A review of the elements within each of the basic findings reveals several that deal with an awareness or sense of others' inner workings.

Sensory cues often involved reading others feelings or thoughts. For example, Queen noticed one teacher's body language and inferred that she was concerned her students were responsible for the school's low scores on the listening portion of a standardized test:

> Queen: I thought she felt bad because she was shaking her head like, "I don't [have good listeners]. Mine are bad."

In hopes of making this teacher feel more comfortable, Queen humorously interjected:

> Queen: I do have a room full of not good listeners. They don't listen to me."

She wanted the teacher to know that even she, the elementary coordinator who is supposed to be an expert, did not have good listeners in her classroom. It is impossible to know if Queen's assessment of the teacher's inner experience was accurate, but her sense of the teacher's emotional needs at that moment led Queen to interject humor.

The feelings participants reported experiencing during humor production often included an awareness of others' feelings. Generally, participants sensed someone else's feelings, internalized them, and reacted accordingly. Jim recounts this process as he describes sensing fear among his teammates:

> Jim: You kind of read the crowd or the group you're with and what's going on, kind of looking around and, and see what--trying to get a sense of like when just a little bit of fear was coming up for the people in the group.

Similarly, many participants reported an awareness of others' thoughts during humor production. Several participants indicated that they interjected humor because they knew what others were thinking. Katie produced humor about her own inability to pass the listening section of a test on which the school's students had performed poorly:

> Katie: I thought somebody else would say the same thing--like that I wasn't the only one. I know I'm not the only one that has that issue.

Her purported knowledge of what was going on inside the heads of the other teachers gave her the confidence to make a self-deprecating, humorous comment.

Evidence of participants' social sensitivity emerged again in Basic Finding 4, which focuses on intentions. One element of intentions is "to communicate information," and some humor producers claimed that the specific type of information they intended to share was *knowledge of what others are thinking or feeling*. During a discussion about a weekend event that his staff was required to attend, Len reported that too many tickets had been sold. If there were not

enough seats for members of the congregation, Len quipped, "The staff will all be in Weil telling our own jokes!" Len explained the reasoning behind his humor:

> Len: And actually what happens to that if we were to oversell? Who is gonna go into the other room? Staff. If you oversell, my chair gets given up. Because staff knows they'll give it up.

Len was confident that his staff knew they would be expected to give up their seats in the main hall if too many guests attended. Knowing that this was an unpleasant but necessary aspect of being a staff member, Len decided to state what he knew his staff was thinking in hopes of bringing lightness to a potentially unpleasant situation.

Participants also describe an awareness of others' inner experiences as part of the context that affected their humor production. For example, Andy interjected humor about communications with a difficult internal department. He was confident that Charlie would understand and appreciate the humor because tense dynamics between the legal department and the other department were an ongoing issue. As Andy reflected upon his experience of producing humor, knowledge of Charlie's perspective on this recurring situation served as context for Andy's comment:

> Andy: I knew what Charlie's response would be when I asked him about this specific issue, because he and I go through this all the time. The same sort of process.

Participants' social sensitivity emerges in Basic Finding 6 as well; participants' assumptions about *others'* beliefs about humor influences their humor

production. For example, some of the tacit assumptions participants reported included: everyone wants to be funny; everyone senses the value of humor; no one wants to offend with humor; nobody wants to be a dud with humor; we all feel anxious before saying things that are supposed to be funny; and we don't want to go over the top with humor. With all of these assumptions, the humor producer claims to know how others feeling about humor. As discussed in the tacit assumptions section of this chapter, such beliefs inform and influence when and how participants choose to produce humor.

Theme 2 was not as pervasive as Theme 1. Humor producers' full engagement in the moment appears to be a pre-requisite for spontaneous humor production in almost all cases. In contrast, only *some* spontaneous humor producers report sensitivity toward the thoughts and feelings of others. Social sensitivity emerged within but did not permeate every type of basic finding. For example, within the external cues type, several sensory cues involved an awareness of others' thoughts and feelings, but participants did not identify any *verbal* cues that required knowledge of others' inner workings. And although several tacit assumptions involve inferences about others' opinions of humor, most dealt only with participants' personal beliefs about it. A humor producer's belief that he or she understands what is going on internally within other people plays an important role in humor production, but not all humor producers in this study experienced or expressed such social sensitivity.

Theme 3: Role affects experience. A person's role in the group affects his or her experience of producing humor. The goal of this study is to identify experiences that are common across a diverse set of humor producers, not to isolate and compare the experiences of specific demographics. However, because this dissertation is grounded within a program of leadership and change, leaders' experiences of humor production are of particular interest. I examined the data to determine if any data differentiated this group from other participants. The sample in this study is small overall (26 participants), and the number who hold positions of formal leadership or management is even smaller (7 participants). (The study did not identify informal leaders.) All of this study's results must be interpreted with caution. The results describe this particular sample of participants' experiences of humor production, and readers must determine transferability of the results based on the characteristics of their population of interest. I present the following comparison of formal leaders' experiences to those of professional and administrative team members to provide additional description of this particular sample and in hopes of identifying variables that deserve attention in future research.

Participants who hold formal positions of management are Charlie, Cowgirl, Grey, Lauren, Len, Magnum and Queen. Across most basic findings, their experiences resembled those of the overall sample. However, their intentions set them apart. As I indicated in Chapter 2, I adopt Rost's (1993) definition of leadership, "Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders

and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (p. 102). Thus, it is not surprising that many of the intentions the seven leaders reported involved a desire to influence others and to create change. The preponderance of their intentions fell into the following elements: to affect others' behaviors, to affect others' feelings, to shift the conversation, and to communicate information. While some professional and administrative team members expressed intentions that fell into these elements as well, the leaders' intentions represented the majority.

Exploring how leaders' intentions manifested in actual interactions clarifies the connection between those intentions and leaders' understanding of their special responsibilities. Lauren, for instance, interjected humor about Anna's long work hours. Lauren worried that Anna would burn herself out and hoped, through her humor, to influence Anna to change her behavior:

> Lauren: I just wanted to make Anna and everybody aware that I was kind of watching 'em--like to make sure that they all left, but mainly that Anna didn't work. That's what I was concerned about.

As the leader of the medical support non-profit agency, Lauren felt a responsibility for Anna's well being, a role that aligns with generally accepted expectations of a leader. She believed that she could positively influence Anna's mental and physical health by encouraging her to change her work habits.

Cowgirl, the principal of the elementary school, interjected humor in hopes of affecting her staffs' feelings, particularly their happiness and their feelings toward Cowgirl:

> Cowgirl: I like everybody to be happy and comfortable. And I want the staff to feel valued in the things that they say. I guess I want them to like me, and I want them to respect me, too. I want it to be everybody's school, so I think I try to make sure everybody is happy. So that's probably why I do that.

Like Lauren, Cowgirl felt responsible for her staff's well being, and she attempted--through humor--to influence and to change their level of satisfaction.

Len used humor to spark a different type of change within his group. His employee Y.H. suggested a solution to a problem that was not feasible and potentially politically damaging. Len did not want to embarrass Y.H. by correcting him in public but felt it necessary to shift the conversation away from Y.H. for the good of the group:

> Len: Just trying to break up the tenor of it. And I wasn't indirectly trying to put Y.H. down, but Y.H. was kind of not getting that in this kind of a social event you don't set up a second hall.

As leader of the Jewish synagogue staff, Len felt responsible for managing (influencing and changing) the tenor and flow of the meeting discussion.

Magnum's intention to communicate specific information also reflected an attempt to exercise leadership through humor. She hoped that by humorously recounting a difficult exchange she had with external counsel, she would motivate her team to create a plan for dealing with similar problems in the future:

> Magnum: [I told the humorous story] sort of as an illustrative example of that situation because dealing with outside counsel is a lot of what we do. And to be able to show that this is something that we were all probably gonna experience and to be able to emphasize that we really did need to get a game plan internally.

As supervisor of the legal department, Magnum felt it was her responsibility to share information that would lead to a needed change in operating procedure.

Leaders' intentions to change and influence their teams distinguished them from the their team members. In turn, team members' attention to leaders' actions, thoughts, and feelings stood out as unique. Many of the basic findings reported by professionals and administrative staff members focused on the importance of the leader (or boss) to those individuals. While leaders tended to focus on the team as a whole or on the particular employee who was speaking, the team often focused on the leader. As Nancy stated, "We often play to Charlie."

For example, Shawn decided to interject humor based on a sensory external cue from his boss Grey:

> Shawn: I could always kind of take a cue from Grey as to, I mean obviously I wouldn't say that in every meeting that I'm in. I remember looking at Grey, and he was kind of smiling.

Having Grey's approval was important to Shawn. As Shawn said, he would not interject humor into "every meeting that I'm in," so he associated some level of risk with his comment. The sensory cue that provided permission to produce humor was especially valuable to Shawn because Grey was the one who enacted it. Shawn stated at another point in his interview, "Most of my comments were really cued off of Grey."

Bob was also very aware of Grey when interjecting humor:

> Bob: Once Grey said it was uncoordinated and they fired several missiles across, I thought it was a perfect time to make it. I didn't want to offend

him since he used to be a partner there.

Once Grey had criticized his old law firm, Bob felt he had permission to poke fun at it. Bob was cognizant of not wanting to offend his boss with his comments.

Similarly, Nancy emphasizes the importance of the boss in establishing a context that welcomes humor:

> Nancy: If they were somebody that I were not comfortable with as my boss, I probably would never say anything like that. Or it would be a lot less sarcastic anyway.

Like Shawn and Bob, knowing that her boss was likely to approve of her humor was important to Nancy.

Several participants also reported using humor as a way to deal with or to express feelings of frustration toward their boss. While some leaders associated humor with frustration, most of the basic findings about frustration emerged from team members. Participants saw humor as a safe and acceptable way to manage negative feelings about their leaders. Alana discusses her frustration with Len below:

> Alana: Sometimes I feel a little bit frustrated. I'm senior staff. I'm in here because you're asking me to be in here to make sure everything else is going on. I'm not supposed to have to answer or have to make sure that Smiley or Sarah is here before I'm supposed to be off. And so that's kind of what I was thinking when I [said], "I'm gone!" I already told you, "I'm outta here." Just because you don't have that official paper don't mean nothing [sic].

Alana responded to Len's request for her formal vacation request by using humor. She knew that maintaining a good relationship with her boss was important, so she avoided directly confronting him with her frustration.

In a larger sample, more distinct differences between the experiences of leaders and team members are likely to emerge. The fact that within this small sample, *intentions to influence and change* distinguished the leaders and a *focus on the boss* distinguished the team members indicates that future studies should pay attention to these variables.

The three themes that emerged from this study differ significantly from one another. Theme 1 proposes the existence of a universal experience among spontaneous humor producers--that all humor producers are fully engaged in the dynamics of the current interaction. Theme 2 reveals a common (but not universal) experience among many humor producers--a sensitivity to others' thoughts and feelings. Theme 3 elucidates the effect of role on the experience of humor production; some aspects of leaders' experiences set them apart from the rest of their team. In the next chapter, I will consider this study's basic findings and themes in light of existing research on humor production.

Chapter V: Discussion

This dissertation study explores the subjective experience of the spontaneous humor producer. The topic of humor production has been addressed only tangentially in the research literature (McGhee, 1971; Mulkay, 1988; Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001; Siegler, 2003; Wanzer et al., 1995), and of the research that exists, very little examines *spontaneous* humor (Craik & Ware, 1998; Long & Graesser, 1988; Martin, 2007). This study is the first to investigate the spontaneous humor producer's experience from the perspective of the producer. Thus, the results of this study provide a new, preliminary understanding of "what is going on" inside an individual who interjects humor into ongoing conversation.

The research question in this study is as follows: What is the subjective experience of the spontaneous humor producer? This study's basic findings reveal details about the types of experiences humor producers have during the process of creating and interjecting humor. Most humor producers in this sample were consciously aware of specific external cues, thoughts, and feelings when they produced humor. Usually, recognition of an external cue triggered participants' thoughts and/or feelings that, in turn, led to the formation of intention(s). Sometimes, participants were aware of what they hoped to accomplish by interjecting humor and, at other times, they recalled their intentions only upon reflection. Producers' tacit assumptions, or underlying beliefs about humor and/or about themselves, as well as certain aspects of the

context affected their humor production as well. The study advances our knowledge of humor producers' experiences by identifying common *categories* of experience, but great variability exists within these categories. Most participants interjected humor in response to an external cue, for instance, but the verbal or sensory cues that a specific individual deemed relevant were highly personal. One participant viewed a quiet, boring atmosphere as a cue to humor while another saw the exact opposite climate – a lively, energetic exchange – as a trigger for humor production.

The study did, however, uncover three important generalizations or themes about the experience of humor production. First, all humor producers in this sample were fully engaged in the dynamics of the current interaction when they contributed humor. Engaged presence and active awareness of the immediate social situation appear to be prerequisites for spontaneous humor production. Also, many humor producers reported having a sense of other group members' internal experiences. This sensitivity to others' thoughts and feelings played a key role in many participants' humor production experience. Finally, participants' roles within the group often led to different experiences of humor production. Leaders tended to initiate humor in hopes of influencing others and/or creating change. Team members who did not hold formal positions of leadership were especially tuned into their managers' actions, thoughts, and feelings.

Integration with the Literature

To explain how the findings summarized above contribute to the literature, I will compare them to the results of existing research. Again, current studies do not directly address the subjective experience of spontaneous humor producers, so I focus on the five most relevant aspects of the literature. First, I will examine how this study's *basic findings* extend our current knowledge by revisiting (1) research on humor functions and (2) studies of tacit knowledge. Then, I will consider this study's *themes* in light of previous (3) research on humor and social sensitivity and (4) humor and hierarchical relationships. Finally, I propose a connection between this study's findings and (5) research on improvisation.

Humor functions and producers' intentions. Existing research on the functions of humor in the workplace and, specifically, in workplace meetings is most relevant to the current study. A direct comparison between the humor functions identified in the literature and humor's functions in the current study is impossible because this study did not include an analysis of humor outcomes or effects. However, participants' intentions when producing humor serve as a reasonable proxy. The question I pose in this section is as follows: Did humor producers in the current study intend to accomplish the functions identified in existing literature? Overall, the answer to this question appears to be "yes": a significant amount of overlap exists between humor functions in the literature and humor producers' intentions (see Table 5.1).

For example, the humor literature identifies strengthening group cohesion and solidarity as a function of humor in the workplace and, specifically, in workplace meetings (Holmes, 2000; Martineau, 1972; Pogrebin & Poole, 1988; Rogerson-Revell, 2007; Scogin & Pollio, 1980; Terrion & Ashforth, 2002). In the current study, participants identified four intentions that reflected a desire to accomplish this function. Two of the intentions fall into the element "to affect others": Cowgirl indicated that she used humor to build relationships with her staff, and Charlie used humor to bond his group together. Two other intentions fall into the element "to communicate information": Nancy used humor to express camaraderie with her teammates while Corey, Erma, and Jim intended to show support for a colleague through humor. All four of these intentions reflect humor producers' desires to enhance group cohesion and a sense of solidarity.

Table 5.1.
Humor Functions in the Literature vs. Humor Producers' Intentions

Humor Functions in the Workplace and in Meetings (Existing Literature)	Humor Producers' Intentions (Current Study)	
	Element	Specific Intentions
Strengthens group cohesion and/or solidarity (Holmes, 2000; Martineau, 1972; Pogrebin & Poole, 1988; Rogerson-Revell, 2007; Scogin & Pollio, 1980; Terrion & Ashforth, 2002)	To affect others	To build relationship with staff
		To create a bond
	To communicate information	To express camaraderie
		To show support for colleague

Humor Functions in the Workplace and in Meetings (Existing Literature)	Humor Producers' Intentions (Current Study)	
	Element	Specific Intentions
Maintains a collegial atmosphere (Bradney, 1957; Holmes & Marra, 2006; Vinton, 1989)	To affect others	To avoid putting employee down
		To include others
		To prevent others from feeling offended
Defines group and individual identity (Collinson, 1988; LaFave et al., 1976; Traylor, 1973; Yoels & Clair, 1995)	To affect others	To set an example for employees
		To affect others' perceptions of me
	To cope	To laugh at self
Enhances leadership effectiveness (Avolio et al., 1999)	To affect others	To ensure they hear the information
		To get others' attention
		To enhance employees' focus
		To inspire others
		To empathize
		To impact staff morale
	To shift the conversation	To refocus the discussion
Creates a more pleasant work environment (Vinton, 1989)	To affect others	To make others laugh
		To make others feel better
Permits escape from the seriousness of the concerns that face the work group (Coser, 1960)	To cope	To make light of stress
	To shift the conversation	To add levity

Humor Functions in the Workplace and in Meetings (Existing Literature)	Humor Producers' Intentions (Current Study)	
	Element	Specific Intentions
Enhances cooperation (Vinton, 1989)	To affect others	To include colleague in conversation
		To emphasize my trustworthiness
		To put self out there on behalf of the group
Highlights and reinforces boundaries between different social groups (Holmes & Marra, 2002b)	To communicate information	To acknowledge a shared experience
Reinforces workplace sub-cultures that develop within organizations (Holmes & Marra, 2002a); Assists in coping with contradictions and paradoxes in its organization's culture (Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993; Hatch, 1997)	To communicate information	To communicate frustration with another department
Provides a socially acceptable way to criticize others (Holmes & Marra, 2002c; Vinton, 1989)	To communicate information	To give feedback to an employee without putting him down
		To express frustration
Challenges established norms and practices (Holmes & Marra, 2002c)	To affect others	To get boss to intervene
		To change others' reaction

It is impossible to know if these participants' humor actually *functioned* as they intended. For example, when Corey humorously imitated the confusing speech pattern of one of Erma's students, her intention was to show support for Erma – to acknowledge the difficult situation that Erma faced each day. Because

this study did not include Erma's reaction to Corey's humor, we do not know if Erma felt supported and, thus, if Corey's interjection functioned to enhance group cohesion and solidarity. Additional research is needed to connect humor producers' intentions in a specific humor incident with the functions of that humor. However, this study extends the current literature by confirming that humor producers *intend* to enact the functions of humor identified within the literature.

Some commonly accepted functions of humor did not align with participants' stated intentions in this study. For example, none of the participants indicated that they used humor to socialize new employees into an organization's culture (Brown & Keegan, 1999; Vinton, 1989), to define gender relationships (Holmes, 2006), or to reduce power differentials (Vinton, 1989; Yedes, 1996). The absence of these intentions in the current study does not mean that humor producers do not ever explicitly hope to enact the associated functions; it simply means that the producers in this particular sample did not do so.

More significant is the absence within the literature of *functions* that parallel some of the *intentions* uncovered in the current study. Several participants used humor to communicate that they knew what others were thinking or feeling. The humor literature does not include an associated function, such as "revealing common knowledge" or "expressing others' thoughts or feelings." Additional research is needed to confirm that such

functions exist. The current study suggests that humor in the workplace may function in ways that researchers have yet to uncover via existing approaches to humor research.

Tacit knowledge. As mentioned in previous chapters, tacit knowledge differentiates the knowledge people absorb through everyday experience from the knowledge people gain through explicit instruction (Sternberg et al., 2000). Research has yet to directly relate humor production to the concept of tacit knowledge, but the current study suggests a strong connection. Each of the basic core findings of this study reflects participants' tacit knowledge about the humor creation and communication process. Each participant responded to those *external cues* that he deemed salient based on his past experience with such cues. Those cues, in turn, evoked *feelings and thoughts* that the participant had come, over time and through experience, to associate with that cue. Based on his knowledge of the specific *context* and of his available repertoire of responses, the individual then decided to interject humor, often with a specific *intention* in mind. Thus, it is participants' tacit knowledge of each aspect of the humor production process that guides them as they interject humor. The fact that each participant possesses *unique* tacit knowledge explains the highly varied and contextual nature of humor production. For example, one person's past experiences taught her that humor is most effective and appropriate at moments of lively discussion while another person's life encounters taught him that moments of silence represented perfect opportunities for humorous

contributions. These two individual's contrasting tacit knowledge about humor explains why they produce humor so differently.

The basic finding most directly related to the concept of tacit knowledge is that "upon reflection, some participants were aware of *tacit assumptions* that guided their production of humor." Tacit assumptions are the unique, underlying beliefs, developed as a result of past experiences, which steer individuals' decision-making and behavior. In other words, as participants revealed their tacit assumptions they were, in effect, revealing how their *tacit knowledge* of humor affected their humor production. For example, one of Grey's tacit assumptions about humor was that it eases others' concerns about his role as a leader. This assumption affected his decision to poke fun at Gordon, his employee:

> Grey: My thoughts and assessment of him [Gordon] are as a subordinate of mine. I may treat Gordon or say something to Pat [another subordinate] a little differently than I would to Melody or to Magnum [who are managers]. So, I was trying to make him--the inclusiveness with him--and trying to get him to open up and be relaxed.

In addition, Grey explained how his past experiences shaped this tacit assumption about humor's relaxing effects:

> Grey: I always had this chip on my shoulder from two points. One was, my father was an executive here and [I] was making sure I tried to earn my keep separate from him. [Also], I probably had a chip over the years to make sure that I measured up because of my age. And then I was a non-engineer. There's still groups of folks in this company that don't think you can lead in this company unless you've got an engineering background. It [humor] may just be a way for me to put people at ease. You know, "This guy is pretty young. This guy--is he getting this because of his dad? This guy's not an engineer." I was picking up on that, and maybe I used it [humor] as kind of an icebreaker.

Grey's tacit knowledge about humor developed as he experimented with ways to manage his own discomfort about being a powerful leader whose qualifications were in doubt. Unconsciously through experience, he developed a tacit assumption about humor's ability to put others at ease; no one instructed him explicitly about this function of humor. His tacit knowledge about how to use humor in situations in which he senses others' discomfort continues to guide his humor production.

The essence of the current study is the explication of humor producers' distinct tacit knowledge about humor and the external cues, thoughts, feelings, intentions, context, and tacit assumptions associated with its production. Connecting the study of tacit knowledge to the study of humor production potentially enriches both the humor and tacit knowledge literatures. First, future studies of humor production may benefit from progress that has already been made in field of tacit knowledge research. For instance, Sternberg et al. (2000) have created and tested a process for eliciting and describing tacit knowledge. This process could be applied to future, larger-scale studies of humor production to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of humor producers' tacit knowledge. Second, the current study successfully used IPR to uncover participants' tacit knowledge, and this method may be a promising addition to the variety of methods currently available to researchers studying other types of tacit knowledge.

Humor and social sensitivity. One of the main findings of the current study is that sensitivity to others' thoughts and feelings plays a significant role in spontaneous humor production. Participants indicated that their assessments of others' inner experiences affected the humor cues they identified, their own thoughts and feelings during humor production, their intentions when interjecting humor, and their interpretation of the humor context. They also reported holding several tacit assumptions that involved having a sense of others' beliefs about humor. Within the social sciences, the concept of "social or interpersonal sensitivity" encompasses this type of heightened awareness of others. Social sensitivity is commonly understood to be "the ability to make correct judgments about the abilities, traits, and states of others from nonverbal cues" (Carney & Harrigan, 2003). Participants in the current study appeared to draw conclusions about others' thoughts and feelings based on both verbal and nonverbal communications, but the concept of social sensitivity serves as a reasonable proxy when searching for comparable existing research. Research that purports to examine the relationship between humor production and social sensitivity (or concepts similar to social sensitivity) has produced mixed results. Dewitt and Verguts (2001) and Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) did not find a connection between the two variables. Wanzer et al.'s (1996) findings *imply* a connection. They found that people with high humor orientation scores--those who report using humor frequently and effectively--are skilled at adjusting their behaviors based on the demands of a specific social

situation. Similarly, Merolla (2006) found that people with high humor orientation scores are especially tuned into the subtle meanings in others' communications.

Contrasting findings may be due partially to slight differences in how researchers defined and measured social sensitivity. Dewitt and Verguts' (2001) definition focused on "being sensitive to what other people think about you" (p. 42) and, thus, encompassed only a narrow aspect of the theme that emerged in the current study. Participants in this study indicated a *wide-ranging* awareness of others' thoughts and feelings that only sometimes included an assessment of what others were thinking about them. Perhaps if Dewitt and Verguts had defined social sensitivity more broadly, they would have found a connection between this variable and humor production.

Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) did not measure social sensitivity directly but concluded that people with a strong humor orientation consider more situations as appropriate for their humor attempts, regardless of the social cues they receive. This result suggests that people who use humor frequently do not pay much attention to what others are thinking and feeling before making a decision to interject humor and, thus, are not especially socially sensitive. This result contradicts this dissertation study's finding, but it is interesting to note Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield themselves found a connection between social sensitivity and humor production in a later study (Wanzer et al., 1996). This later study as well Merolla's (2006) study (which also

suggests a connection between humor production and social sensitivity) included variables better aligned with the current study's concept of social sensitivity.

Social sensitivity was not a key variable in the study by Wanzer et al. (1996); the finding indicating a connection between humor production and social sensitivity had to be extrapolated from other data within their study. Merolla (2006) conducted the only study expressly designed to investigate the type of social sensitivity that emerged in this dissertation study. The current study suggests that social sensitivity plays a much larger role in humor production than existing literature recognizes. Further investigation into the relationship between these two variables appears to be warranted.

Humor and hierarchical relationships. Research on humor production and hierarchical relationships has produced mixed results. One study found that group members' status did not affect frequency of humor initiation (Traylor, 1973), and two found that people who do *not* hold a formal position of power produce *more* humor than higher status individuals. The current study's findings align with the preponderance of studies that indicate employees with higher power status produce the *most* humor (Bradney, 1957; Coser, 1960; Duncan, 1982; Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001). The overall sample of this study is small, so its results must be interpreted with caution. However, all but one of the leader/managers in this study produced more humor than his or her subordinates (See Tables 4.4, 4.6, 4.8, 4.10, and 4.12). Charlie, the one manager

who did not produce the most humor in his group still produced more humor than all but one of his employees. The differences in humor production among leaders and subordinates in the current study replicated the pattern most common within existing literature.

In addition to investigating the differences in *frequency* of humor production among high and low status individuals, prior research compared the *type* of humor these groups produced. Robinson and Smith-Lovin (2001) found that low status members produced a larger proportion of cohesion-building humor while high status members produced a larger proportion of differentiating humor. Differentiating humor breaks down the sense that "we're all in this together" and points out distinctions among group members; group members are likely to use it to establish or maintain hierarchy within a group. The current study's results contradict those of Robinson and Smith-Lovin's. The leaders in this study demonstrated a strong desire to build cohesion among team members, frequently using humor to influence others and to create change *for the good of the group*. All of the quotations in Chapter 4 that illustrate leaders' most common intentions reflect this focus on community and team-building: Lauren wanted to make sure that her employees were happy and, specifically that Anna did not work to the point of burnout. Cowgirl wanted her team members to feel ownership of the institution, for "it to be everybody's school." Len interjected humor in hopes of correcting an employee without embarrassing him; and Magnum told a humorous story in hopes that her team would create a mutually

beneficial plan. Certainly, it is possible that leaders were actually motivated by a desire to differentiate but did not want to admit to having such intentions. However, my own interpretation of the leaders' motivations in each of these instances aligned with their own reports. I understood their humor to be good-natured attempts to move the group in a positive and productive direction. My reaction does not confirm leaders' stated motivations, but it adds support to their accounts.

This study does provide support for one aspect of previous research on the type of humor that lower status individuals are likely to produce. Duncan (1982) found that lower status employees use humor "as a means of expressing socially risky communications" (p. 140). This study found that several professional and administrative participants (those without formal leadership positions) used humor to deal with or to express feelings of frustration toward their bosses. Because confronting the boss directly, especially in the context of a public meeting, is generally unacceptable, humor provided a suitable way for employees to express dissatisfaction or to criticize their bosses. In Chapter 4, I provided an example in which Alana used humor to express her frustration with her boss Len's decision to question her vacation plans during the staff meeting. She explained that she saw humor as a non-confrontational way of communicating her feelings to Len. Similarly, Katie responded humorously after her boss Cowgirl read a long, academic explanation of her plan to integrate more

critical thinking activities into the school's curriculum. Katie explained the serious message she was trying to convey to Cowgirl through her humor:

> Katie: Please just say it in layman's terms. *Please.* I understood every word you said. Why did you have to say it like that? Why did you have to read that whole thing and not just say, "The point is, we need to do critical thinking, or we need to come up with something new." I think it feels like an attack--as if we weren't doing it already.

Katie was upset that Cowgirl did not recognize the faculty's current efforts in the area of critical thinking. Furthermore, she found Cowgirl's communication style offensive. Katie did not feel comfortable sharing these critical reactions with Cowgirl directly, so instead, Katie interjected humor.

Alana and Katie's quotations above emphasize how important their bosses' opinions and actions are to them. Both women had intense emotional reactions when they felt that their bosses were criticizing their performance and, subsequently, communicated that frustration through humor. One of this study's findings that extends existing research deals with low status humor producers' heightened awareness of their leader or managers' actions, thoughts, and feelings. While leaders tended to focus on the team as a whole or on the particular employee who was speaking, team members often focused on the leader when producing humor. Thus, team members are not only socially sensitive *in general* but are highly sensitive to their leaders' current behavior and potential reactions to a humorous interjection. Existing research has not addressed this particular difference between high and low status team members' experiences of humor production.

Spontaneous humor production and improvisation. Improvisation is "the production or execution of anything off-hand; any work or structure produced on the spur of the moment" (*Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2010). Based on this definition, spontaneous humor qualifies as a form of improvisation. Sawyer (2000, 2001) suggests that all aspects of conversation involve improvisation and has conducted several studies that investigate the parallels between improvisational theater and conversation. Many of the parallels he identified appear to exist between improvisation and spontaneous humor production as well.

Two of the main rules that guide theatrical improvisation are especially relevant to the current study (Sawyer, 2001). On rule instructs: "Don't write the script in your head" (Sawyer, 2001, p. 17). This rule emphasizes the importance of being fully engaged in the moment; improvisational actors must react immediately to other actors' performances. Writing the script in one's head rather than listening intently and reacting spontaneously to others' comments and actions results in a failed scene. Crossan (1998), another prominent improvisation researcher, explains that improvisation "demands that individuals give their full concentration and attention to the moment, rather than being preoccupied with what happened or what could happen" (p. 597). Similarly, the results of this study suggest that spontaneous humor producers are fully engaged in the dynamics of the current interaction, reacting spontaneously to the action-in-the-moment. All of the spontaneous humor producers in this study

expressed a deep awareness of what was going on around them in the moment they interjected humor.

Another rule of improvisation demands: "Listen to the group mind" (Sawyer, 2001, p. 18). This rule guides improvisational actors to shift their focus away from their own thinking and toward an awareness of what is going on with their fellow actors. As actors respond in the moment to each others' verbal and nonverbal signals, the scene emerges successfully and collaboratively. Likewise, in the current study, many humor producers displayed a heightened awareness of others. They often interjected humor in response to the thoughts and feelings they assumed others were experiencing.

The process through which actors become skilled at improvising also corresponds with this study's results. Although some general rules guide improvisation, every improvisational scene is new and unique. Actors learn to improvise primarily through experience and practice, by developing tacit knowledge of the art (Sawyer, 2001): "Just like aspiring actors, we learn to become better improvisers by continually improvising . . . It's not a body of knowledge that you can write down in a book and learn by studying; the only way to learn is by doing it" (p. 201). The current study proposes that humor producers learn how and when to create and communicate humor through repeated experiences that influence the cues to which they react, the thoughts and feelings they experience, the intentions with which they act, the context to which they pay attention, and the tacit assumptions that guide them. Sawyer's

(2001) description of the tacit knowledge required to improvise during conversation could easily describe the tacit knowledge of humor production as well: "Our prior experiences affect how we create conversation. . . .No two conversations are exactly alike; we can't just memorize the successful lines from one great conversation and expect them to work in the next conversations" (p. 105). Because no two interactions are identical, spontaneous humor producers must respond to the immediate context. They cannot just learn and repeat stock phrases. In the course of conversation, and specifically during humor production, people rely on tacit knowledge to guide their words and actions.

Recognizing the connections between improvisation and spontaneous humor production enriches the existing humor literature in two ways. First, research on improvisation – especially research on conversational improvisation – may point to potentially fruitful areas for future study. Second, improvisation is an established art, and methods for teaching people to improve their improvisational skills are well established (Crossan, 1998). Some of the techniques used to enhance people's improvisational skills may be of use to those who wish to improve their ability to produce spontaneous humor. I examine each of these implications below.

Implications for future research. One potential area for future research involves the different "humor characters" or "humor personas" that humor producers may possess. In his studies of conversations as improvisation, Sawyer

(2001) found that, like improvisational actors, people engaged in conversation often possess different "characters" that they activate based on the given situation. Actors are encouraged to develop different characters that they can use repeatedly in various scenes. Similarly, during everyday conversation, an individual may portray different personas based on the context. For example, he may enact one persona at work and a very different one when conversing with close friends. Given the commonalities between improvisation and the production of spontaneous humor, it is likely that people possess different "humor characters" as well--unique ways of interjecting humor based on the immediate context. During his IPR interview, Jim described a colleague who possesses a couple of humor characters. Jim explained that his colleague is a funny person in general, but he has a specific personality he adopts during negotiations with other companies:

> Jim: You've got to bring [my colleague] the humor guy in to do whatever impromptu song and dance he's gonna do. It's odd, you know, it's almost *understood*. That's a role that he ends up playing and, and it's a useful role.

Jim recognized that his colleague took on a specific humor persona in social situations and another persona during business interactions. It is likely that the type of humor this individual shared in one setting was quite different from the type he utilized in the other.

Jim also talked about his own flexible humor persona. He described himself as someone who uses humor very differently in his personal and professional lives. He described his humor character at work as follows:

> Jim: I did make a conscientious effort to be who I thought they wanted me to be and emulate some of the upper management. I kind of adopted the persona that was expected.

Nancy may have been alluding to her different humor personas as well when she stated, "You know, if they were somebody that I were not comfortable with as my boss, I probably would never say anything like that. Or it would be a lot less sarcastic anyway." In addition to describing how the context affected her humor, this statement implies that Nancy possesses another, less sarcastic, softer humor persona that she turns on in situations where she does not know her audience well. Future studies of humor production may investigate whether different situations evoke distinct humor characters, how such personas develop, and how they affect humor production.

Sawyer (2001) also found subjective differences between the work product of improvisational groups that rehearsed regularly and the performances of those that did not rehearse and/or did not know each other before performing as an ensemble. A cast that rehearses together learns each other's rhythms and develops trust among group members. They learn "how to listen to each other, how to get into the odd mindset of not thinking ahead" (p. 113). It stands to reason, then, that humor emerging among established groups may differ from humor that occurs in new groups. None of the teams that participated in the current study were brand new groups, and the sample size in the current study was small, so this dissertation does not enable a comparison between the experiences of humor producers from long-term teams with experiences of

humor producers from developing teams. Future research may explore how a team's tenure affects the type and frequency of humor production.

Implications for enhancing humor production skills. Existing literature on teaching and learning improvisation may provide guidance to those wishing to enhance their humor production skills. Zaporah (1995), Spolin (1999), and Vera and Crossan (2005) have developed well-respected improvisation training programs. Both programs focus on training actors and include a wide range of activities designed to "expand awareness, stimulate imagination, strengthen capacity for feeling, and develop skills of expression" (Zaporah, 1995, p. xii), but neither has undergone rigorous outcomes evaluation. Vera and Crossan's (2005) program was developed for use in business settings – to train employees to improvise and, in turn, to apply these skills in organizations. A preliminary study of this program's effectiveness revealed "training in improvisation increases the incidence and the quality of improvisation" (p. 218).

Applying the lessons of improvisation training programs such as these to humor production training may have two types of benefits. First, because strong improvisational skills enhance one's ability to act spontaneously, to fully engage in the moment, and to pay attention to others' verbal and nonverbal cues, established improvisation training programs may enhance spontaneous humor production. Research is needed to determine if such programs in their current format actually enhance humor production. Second, the strong parallels between improvisation and humor production suggest that techniques and

activities from improvisational training programs may be adapted to develop specialized humor production training modules. Again, future research may address the development and evaluation of such efforts.

Implications for Leadership

The improvisation literature builds a bridge between research on spontaneous humor and leadership as well. Several researchers have connected the art of improvisation to the practice of leadership (Ciborra, 1999; Crossan, 1998; Hatch, 1999, Weick, 1998), suggesting that the skills needed to successfully improvise – many of the same skills that are necessary to produce spontaneous humor--may be essential to successful leadership. The organizational systems in which we operate are constantly evolving, and "the spontaneous and creative facets of improvisation" (Vera & Crossan, 2005) are especially critical in today's environment. Peter Vaill (1996) coined the expression "permanent white water" (p.4) to describe the "complex, turbulent, changing environment in which we are all trying to operate" (p. 4). He suggests that "today's complex, interdependent, and unstable systems require continual imaginative and creative initiatives and responses by those living and working in them – and especially by those leading and managing them" (p. 5). Thus, understanding and bolstering the skills that enable improvisation and spontaneous humor production may benefit leaders.

In addition to establishing links between improvisation, leadership, and spontaneous humor, this dissertation study provides leaders a deeper understanding of "what is going on" when they produce humor. The literature I

reviewed in Chapter 2 indicates that a connection exists between effective leadership and the skillful use of humor (Bass, 1990; Clouse & Spurgeon, 1995; Goldstein, 1976; Holmes & Marra, 2006), and the leaders in this study did, in fact, use humor with the intention of accomplishing leadership objectives. Many of them reported interjecting humor in hopes of influencing others and/or creating change. Thus, having a better understanding of how and why one is producing humor is likely to enhance a leader's performance.

Shortly after I completed IPR interviews at the private elementary school, I received an e-mail from Queen, the lead teacher coordinator. She wrote, "We had a staff meeting just yesterday and I was honestly more aware of the humor aspect, when used." Higgins (1996), who studies the effects of self-knowledge, has found that such heightened awareness of how one interacts with the world plays important self-regulatory functions: It "facilitates adaptation to one's environment [and] summarizes a person's relations to his or her world and the personal consequences of these relations" (p. 1078). Leaders who understand their own experience of humor production are likely to do so more purposefully and, perhaps, even more effectively.

Queen's observation that she became more aware of how and when her team used humor raises another idea for future research. Reading the results of this study may make leaders more aware of their own humor production experiences, but participating in the IPR process is likely to create even deeper, more personalized self-knowledge. Following up with participants who have

analyzed their own humor production through an IPR interview would create an interesting and potentially fruitful next research study. How does a heightened awareness of one's own humor production experience alter one's use of humor? Does it cause participants to become more deliberate in the way they employ humor? Does it change the frequency with which an individual interjects humor? How does it alter their awareness of others' use of humor? Are leaders who have completed in an IPR interview likely to use humor more effectively following participation?

Knowledge about the experience of humor production may also provide leaders with an advantage when trying to understand and communicate with subordinates who use humor. For example, knowing that employees often use humor to express frustration with their leaders may cause leaders to pay more attention when their subordinates interject humor. During the staff meeting at the Jewish synagogue, Alana twice interjected humor in response to Len's requests for information about her vacation plans. She explained that she was frustrated with Len's public questioning and stated that she used humor as a non-confrontational way to communicate her unhappiness with him. However, she did not think Len picked up on her frustration: "I don't think he gets it a lot of times, I'll be honest." If Len had been watching for signs of employee humor that potentially indicated frustration or veiled criticism of his actions, he could possibly have followed up on Alana's comments after the meeting. Addressing

her frustration directly might prevent it from festering and growing as it had in this instance.

Limitations of Study

Several characteristics of this study's sample represent important limitations that must be considered when interpreting its results. Three teams that I invited to participate in the study declined my invitation. It is likely that some differences exist between those teams that accepted my invitation and those that did not. For example, the nature of humor producers' experiences (as well as in the type and frequency of humor) within groups willing to be videotaped may differ from the experiences of humor producers within groups that chose not to participate. Also, the small sample size of 26 participants was appropriate given the exploratory goals of the study. However, this is nevertheless a very small sample. In addition, all participants live in a city with a very traditional, Southern culture which may affect how and why people use humor. All of the interactions from which data were gathered took place in the context of workplace meetings and, therefore, results may not transfer outside of this environment. The study's results must be interpreted with caution. The results describe this particular sample of participants' experiences of humor production, and readers must determine transferability of the results based on the characteristics of their population of interest.

Another potential limitation of this study is that it focuses on humor that led to amusement and, therefore, did not capture humor that evoked negative

responses such as nervousness or embarrassment. This focus prevented me from examining differences that may exist between the experiences of creating humor that led to positive versus negative effects. However, delimiting the current study in this manner made sense in light of the paucity of research on all types of humor production. Again, the results of this study must be interpreted appropriately. They describe the experiences of spontaneous humor producers who communicated humor that led to their own or others' amusement.

Recommendations for Future Research

I have introduced several recommendations for future research throughout previous sections of this chapter. To review, future studies may investigate:

- The relationship between humor producers' intentions in a specific humor incident with the actual outcomes and/or social functions of that humor. A study of this topic would extend the current study by including the perspectives of audience members/ humor recipients. For example, when Lana intended to communicate surprise through humor, what effect did her interjection have on the rest of the group?
- The existence of a humor function analogous to this study's finding that humor producers act with the intentions of revealing common knowledge or expressing others' thoughts or feelings.
- The relationship between social sensitivity and humor production.
- The concept of humor "characters" or personas--how such personas

develop, and how they affect humor production.

- How a team's tenure affects the type and frequency of humor production.
- The effectiveness of improvisation training programs: do they enhance improvisational skills essential to humor production such as the ability to act spontaneously, to fully engage in the moment, and to pay attention to others' verbal and nonverbal cues?
- How techniques and activities from improvisational training programs may be adapted to develop effective humor production training modules.
- The application of Sternberg et al.'s (2000) process for developing tacit knowledge inventories to a larger-scale study of humor production.
- The effects of participating in IPR interviews on participants' (and, specifically, leaders') subsequent use of humor.

An additional recommendation for future research is to conduct a large-scale quantitative study that investigates relationships among the variables identified in the current study. The initial stages of the study may be designed similarly to the current research, identifying groups willing to be videotaped and reviewing video footage of humor incidents with participants. However, instead of participating in an IPR interview, participants would complete a survey instrument designed to gather information about their experience of humor production: their external cues to humor, thoughts, feelings, intentions,

awareness of contextual variables, and tacit assumptions. Using statistical analysis, the survey results would be analyzed to explore connections among the variables. For example, did specific types of external cues lead to specific intentions? Was there a connection between certain types of thoughts or feelings and the contextual variables of which humor producers tend to be aware?

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how this dissertation study of spontaneous humor production fits into and extends the current humor literature as well as its implications for leaders and for future research. This study also highlights the general importance humor in the work environment. The emergence of humor in *all* of the groups I videotaped supports Mulkay's (1988) assertion that "humor is one of the few basic social phenomena which occur in all groups" (p. 1). Participants were universally excited to learn that the focus of my study was humor, and all were enthusiastic about exploring their personal experiences of producing humor. Many shared with me how much they valued humor in their team interactions. Marc described humor as the one thing that about staff meetings that he looked forward to, "one of the reasons they're bearable." Grey concurred, "Everybody's got things to do and nobody's real excited about having to sit in an hour-long staff meeting with *me*, so I try to inject a little humor every time." In addition to being a ubiquitous mode of communication and facilitating important social functions, humor makes work--as well as conducting research in the workplace--fun and rewarding.

Ideally, this dissertation study will spark additional interest in research on humor production, a topic that warrants additional attention. In addition, I hope it enhances the research community's view of humor as a valuable topic of research in general.

APPENDIX

Appendix A
Consent Form
Interpersonal Dynamics in Organizational Meetings

The researcher has explained the following information to me:

1. I am volunteering to participate in a study of interpersonal dynamics in organizational meetings. I understand that I will be videotaped during today's meeting.

2. **The benefits I may expect from the pilot study are:** (a) exposure to the process of academic research and (b) the opportunity to contribute to research that may benefit other employees and organizations.

3. The procedure will be as follows:

a. Ms. Lisa Graham will videotape today's meeting. All of my participation during the meeting may be captured in this video.

b. Ms. Graham will review the videotape and choose sections of tape to be reviewed during individual follow-up interviews. Only some – or perhaps even none – of the participants in today's meeting will be selected to participate in a follow-up meeting. *An invitation to participate (or lack thereof) does not imply any judgment about my performance during the meeting*. Ms. Graham is interested in specific interpersonal dynamics in organizational meetings and will select video footage most relevant to her study.

c. If I am selected to participate in a follow-up interview, I will make all reasonable efforts to be available one or two days from today for one hour to meet with Ms. Graham. During this interview, Ms. Graham will use a digital voice recorder to capture our conversation, and I will view video footage of myself contributing to the meeting.

d. I may appear as an active or passive participant in the video that Ms. Graham plays during follow-up interviews with my colleagues.

4. **I understand that participating in this study poses some potential risks**. Being videotaped may provoke anxiety. Also, if I am chosen to participate in a follow-up interview, watching myself on video may spark a distressful emotional response within me. If I experience any distress as a result of participating in this study, I understand that I may contact Dr. Julie McDonald, a clinical psychologist, to discuss my concerns. She may be reached at Bair, Peacock, McDonald, & McMullan: 205-822-7348

5. **Data from this study is strictly confidential.** My name and the name of my organization will be changed in all print documentation associated with this study. Only members of Ms. Graham's research team will have access to the videotape of today's meeting, audio recordings of follow-up interviews, and print documentation

associated with this study. Client names mentioned during the videotaped meeting will be deleted from transcripts.

6. **Ms. Graham will contact me directly if she wishes to use data from the current study in future research.** She will not use video, audio, or print data that includes me without first obtaining my permission to do so.

7. **I have rights as a research volunteer.** Taking part in this study is voluntary. I may stop taking part in this study at any time with no penalty or loss of benefits to which I may otherwise be entitled.

If I want to withdraw from this study, I understand that it is best to do so *before videotaping begins*. If I withdraw from the study *after* videotaping is complete, I will not be obligated to complete a follow-up interview, and Ms. Graham will make every effort to purge images and voice recordings that include me. However, because the camera captures a wide shot of the entire group, my image or voice may be present in the background of the video footage Ms. Graham presents during follow-up interviews.

Contact information for researcher:

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If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, call or write:

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Consent Statement:

I have read and understood the information above and on the previous page. The researcher has answered all the questions I have to my satisfaction and has provided me with a copy of both pages of this form. I consent to take part in this study of *Interpersonal Dynamics in Organizational Meetings*.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Witness: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

Demographic Information

Name: _____

Company/ Organization: _____

Title: _____

How long have you worked at this organization?_____

How long have you worked in this department?_____

How long have you held your current position?_____

E-mail:_____

Work number: _____ Cell number: _____

Code Name: _____

If you would like to choose your own code name, please do so. If not, one will be assigned to you.

Gender: M / F

Age:

- ☐ 21-25
- ☐ 26-30
- ☐ 31-35
- ☐ 36-40
- ☐ 41-45
- ☐ 46-50
- ☐ 51-55
- ☐ 56-60
- ☐ 61-65
- ☐ 66-70

Ethnicity: _____

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