

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE ROLE OF HUMOR
IN THE LIVES OF HIGHLY CREATIVE YOUNG ADULTS

by

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(Under the Direction of Bonnie Cramond)

ABSTRACT

According to the available literature, humor and creativity have had many productive short-term relationships. However, current research does not address the possibility of a connection between long-term exposure to a humorous background and the development of creativity in young adults. What types of connections, if any, do participants make between a consistent humorous influence in their lives and their creative production? What developmental and environmental factors do participants associate with their creative production? Do they spontaneously remember and speak of background humor?

The purpose of this study was to examine the role humor played in the lives of highly creative young adults. Research data was collected from six participants through the use of semi-structured personal interviews. Questions focused on family and school interactions, memories of humorous instances from childhood or later, conditions necessary to be creative, and making a connection between creative production and background humor.

As data were analyzed, four main ideas emerged. First, the development of creativity required a positive support system from one or more sources. Second, humor was an “incidental” in recollections of family interactions. Third, most participants acknowledged the benefits of teaching with humor. Finally, there was some difficulty among participants in establishing a connection between a humorous background and high personal creativity.

Findings indicated that humor is a form of creativity that may or may not provide inspiration for creative young adults, depending on whether or not it is acknowledged as relevant in their lives. Ongoing humor was, in general, not perceived as a significant contributor to creative production. But the study also indicated that a personal sense of humor might be the means by which individuals could become more receptive to new ideas. Therefore, exposure to a more consistent source of humor, such as humorous teaching, might better prepare children for life as young adults who are creative in many fields.

INDEX WORDS: Humor, Connection, Creativity, Background, Family, Academics, Play, Teaching

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to all members of the humor race whose ability to laugh and/or make others laugh has been---or will be---a source of creative inspiration.

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My parents, Muriel and Gene Vasilew, taught me the value of persistence and humor in the face of a challenge. To both of them I owe my steadfast pursuit of this degree--and of the countless other wonderful things that I will make happen in my life.

The many gatherings of my immediate and extended family, the Vasilews, the Katzes, and the Blasenheims, have always been full of laughter, love, and creative energy. I thank them all for supplying the very “essence” of my research.

And finally, a grateful thanks to my academic advisors, Drs. Bonnie Cramond and Tom Hebert. May your days together at the nursing home be filled with memories of the many amusing moments we shared—often at my expense, but all in good fun.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“When a man sits with a nice girl for two hours, it seems like a minute. But let him sit on a hot stove for a minute, and it feels like two hours. That’s relativity.”

(Albert Einstein, 1907 as cited in Highfield & Carter, 1993, p. 48)

Two things are interesting about the above quotation. One is that Einstein found a creative way to describe the relationship between time, space, gravitation, and matter. The other is that he inadvertently demonstrated the relationship between the creative mind and the use of humor.

It is only within a comparatively short period of time, perhaps the last ten to fifteen years, that a body of studies has emerged with the intention of clarifying and finally confirming the relationship between creativity and humor. Several writers such as Arieti (1976) and, in particular, Koestler (1964) have equated humor production with an “act of creation”. Creativity and humor researchers have begun to look more closely at the lives of those who we think of as geniuses and visionaries and have uncovered a strong inclination among many of these great thinkers toward humor production and appreciation. For example, Fisher (1995) mentioned that most biographical accounts of Leonardo da Vinci do not acknowledge his propensity toward practical joking and other forms of off-beat humor. Some of his most unique creations, such as staircases that seemed

to “chase” each other in opposing directions, and a journal with backwards writing that, when “decoded”, gave the reader instructions for building a stink bomb, were designed solely for the amusement of his patrons.

With the connection between creativity and humor thus suggested, it remains to acknowledge and understand the multidimensional nature of the creativity/humor connection. The available literature tells us the following: that the production and comprehension of humor is a form of creativity in and of itself (e.g., Freud, 1905; Koestler, 1964; Ziv, 1984; Fry & Allen, 1996; Parkin, 1997); that individuals known to be creative are more adept at creating their own humor and appreciating the humor of others (e.g., Torrance, 1961; Wallach & Kogan, 1965; Ziv, 1984); and that exposure to humor often stimulates and enhances creative thought in other areas (e.g., Torrance, 1961; Roe, 1963; Hickerson, 1989; Shade, 1991).

Barriers to Making a Creativity-Humor Connection

Despite numerous studies such as these, several elements come into play that discourage the consideration of humor use and appreciation as a means of generating creativity. First, the playful mentality that is associated with young children decreases as they get older because they are pressured to view life with a more rational and serious perspective (Ziv, 1989). Second, as Shade (1991) observed, verbal humor is often not recognized as a form of creativity because there are no tangible products associated with it. Third, Ziv (1989) found that humor has been neglected as an intensifier of creativity because it is believed by many researchers to be a personality trait that cannot be learned. Fourth,

perhaps because humor is associated with frivolity and playfulness, there is often resistance to examining it within the context of serious research (such as a study of creativity) or as an alternative method for teaching a serious subject. Finally, and often a consequence of the two previous factors, when faced with the question of the origins of an individual's high creativity, parents, teachers, and others involved in a child's development rarely consider the effects of a humorous background (Nilsen & Nilsen, 1987).

Statement of the Problem

My research focused on the individual's environment as a key factor in developing and sustaining creativity. In particular, I explored the possibility that a background which is remembered and described by participants as humorous—because of the duration and/or impact of humorous situations—affects the creative production of these individuals.

There exists a gap in the research concerning the long-term effects of a humorous environment on the development of creativity. Although the literature abounds with information to support the idea that humor can foster creativity in other areas of interest, this information is often confined to theory or limited to short-term studies conducted in a decontextualized, artificial environment. The results have the most significant meaning only within the context of the study.

However if humor is to affect the development of creativity in other areas, it may require long-term exposure infused throughout life experiences. There is, for example, research documenting the role of environmental factors on the development of music appreciation and ability. Gembris and Davidson (2002)

described the continuous input in support of musical talent from a variety of sources, from infancy through adulthood. Of particular importance were early shared experiences between mother and child (parent singing to baby), and school music programs. Yet there are no studies which explore a possible connection between consistent exposure to humor from childhood to the present and the development of high creativity in young adults.

Defining a Central Term

Before proceeding with a discussion of humor and creativity from the perspective of my participants, it will be necessary to clarify a term that is central to the study: “humorous background”. For the purposes of this study, a humorous background was defined as any form of humor that participants remember because it is/was consistent or pervasive enough to characterize an individual or a social interaction in their lives. This form of humor can come from any source and from earliest memory to the present time.

The element of consistency was an important one. For example, to say, “I remember a joke my dad told that day” is indicative of a humorous moment that the participant recalls due to a memory “trigger”. Standing alone, this statement has a transient quality, and thus it would not be considered part of a humorous background. An exception to this would be if this particular joke was described by the participant as source of creative inspiration.

However, if in response to further questioning the interviewee says, “I remember that my dad had a quick wit and kept me laughing all the time”, then a

humorous condition is being recalled because of its consistency; the response implies an ongoing interaction at some time in the participant's background.

McGhee (1979) defined "sense of humor" in terms of consistency. He said that those who others describe as having a sense of humor respond to and initiate humor more often. In this investigation, the definition of a humorous background included my participants' own senses of humor. If frequent reference was made to the role a personal sense of humor played (or continues to play), this was considered a part of the background that inspired their creative production. However, if participants made reference to being in a humorous mood or frame of mind at the time a work was created, this transient state was not considered to be part of a humorous background.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand the role of humor in the lives of highly creative young adults. The overarching research question was: What are the participants' perceptions of how the presence of humor in their backgrounds has influenced their creative production? Secondary questions were:

1. What developmental and environmental factors do participants associate with their creative production?
2. Do participants spontaneously remember and speak of background humor, or must their discussion of humor be prompted?
3. What types of connections, if any, do participants make between a strong and/ or consistent humorous influence and their creative production?

Significance of the Study

This study will contribute to the literature by exploring the connection between humor and creativity in a new way. My research moved away from experimental, cause-and-effect, short term investigations and focused on an exploration of this relationship from an interpretivistic standpoint. I sought to understand the production of highly creative work through the meaning that creative students themselves made of their background experiences with humor. I considered the influence of the passage of time and degree of immersion on the role that humor plays in the lives of these individuals. My hope was that the act of applying phenomenological methodology to this study would offer new insight and provide theorists with data that was rich with detail that can come only from stories of lived experience. In this way, the study addressed the gap in the literature created by an absence of long-term investigations of the subject.

My intention was to investigate the possibility that highly creative students might have clear recollections and perceptions of humorous experiences and, more significantly, that they might be able to connect the continual presence of humor in their lives with their creative strengths. If so, this would present a stronger argument for identifying humor as an “official” teaching strategy to be included in the college curriculum of future educators and as a part of the prescribed curriculum for children at all levels. It might also indicate a need for more frequent and effective communication with parents about the importance of incorporating humor regularly through family interactions at home.

CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Defining Creativity : Process and Product

A study of the literature reveals that there are various aspects of creativity upon which researchers focus in order to arrive at a “comprehensive” definition. Rhodes (1961) defined creativity in terms of what he called the “4 P’s”: person, process, press, and product. Defining creativity in terms of the person meant addressing personality, intellect, attitudes, and a host of behaviors that might lead to identifying a creative individual. The term “process” applied to learning, thinking, perceiving, and communicating, which Rhodes believed were the teachable aspects of creativity. “Press” pertained to the relationship between a person and his environment-- what Rhodes referred to as a person’s “ecology”(p. 308). This relationship can be measured in terms of its degree of dissonance and congruence. The “product” is an idea, communicated to others, that may or may not take tangible form. Rhodes referred to products as “artifacts of thought” (p. 309), the vehicles through which the mental processes involved in creating can be reconstructed.

Other definitions of creativity look only at the cognitive stages leading to invention or discovery, such as preparation, incubation, and illumination (Wallas, 1926; Torrance & Safter, 1991). Others are more concerned with the affective consequences of creativity, such as the feeling of relief and release from stress and the pleasure associated with illumination (Latta, 1999). Another view is that

creativity is itself a process; that it is the pursuit of an objective that can never be realized and therefore provides a continuous challenge to be met by the dedication and drive of the pursuer (Roe, 1963). For others, creativity is the embodiment of the creator's knowledge and skill; the more knowledgeable the creator is, the more information s/he has at his/her disposal for making original connections and developing original products (Weisberg, 1993). Fabun (1969) offered a succinct yet more encompassing definition. He described creativity as the process by which original patterns are formed, expressed, or discovered.

As I will discuss more thoroughly at a later point, the humor process easily conforms to this last definition. Almost without exception, the literature on humor makes a clear connection between humor creation as invention, as a process leading to a product, and humor appreciation as discovery—and both invention and discovery involve a form of problem solving.

Extensive research on the creative process and product was a hallmark of the 1950s and 1960s, the greatest emphasis being on an examination of the process of divergent thinking. Osborn (1957) pointed out that creative imagination is a basic tool in the acquisition of knowledge and is found in all humans, to some degree. He discussed the development of creative potential and the necessity of removing what he called “blocks” to creativity, such as premature negative judgment of an idea. Although his ideas were criticized as a “packaged” program for creative potential (Sternberg, 1999), other researchers were developing more comprehensive theories of creativity, especially as it relates to intelligence.

Guilford (1967) discussed creativity as a component of intelligence in his model of human intelligences, called the Structure of the Intellect. According to his model, intelligence has three aspects or dimensions: content, operations (processes), and products. Content is simply the information upon which the other two dimensions can act. Mental processes are described as cognition, memory, convergent production, divergent production, and evaluation. Products of human intelligence include units, classes, relations, systems, transformations, and implications. He focused on divergent thinking in the development of tests designed to measure different levels of creativity and to determine its practical and theoretical value.

In his description of the Structure of the Intellect, Guilford (1977) emphasized the importance of both divergent and convergent thinking in the development of novel ideas. He stated that divergent thinking produced a quantity of ideas and convergent thinking contributed to the quality of ideas.

Torrance (1966) developed the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT) in an effort to “test” his own process-oriented theory of creativity and to assist in recognizing creative potential. He suggested that the person, product, and environment should be viewed from the creative process, since this is where ideas are produced (Torrance, 1988). His problem solving-based definition of creativity has its origins in the early work of Guilford (1959), and he first used this four-faceted definition to evaluate the TTCT. Fluency was defined as

quantity of ideas, elaboration as quality or detailed description of ideas, flexibility as openness to new ideas, and originality as production of uncommon ideas.¹

In a cognitive phenomenon he called “flow,” Csikszentmihalyi (1975) described a deep immersion in the creative process; individuals become so engrossed in an activity that they are unaware of fatigue, the passage of time, or hunger. Conditions necessary for this include an awareness of one’s goals, receiving immediate feedback on one’s progress, a match between the task and the individual’s ability, and a sense of control over one’s actions (1990).

Many theorists, on the one hand, think of creativity in terms of a process, but on the other hand, look for signs of it---and tend to define it--almost exclusively through the product (Hennessey & Amabile, 1988). In fact, it has been suggested by some researchers that the creative process, person, and environment be explained with reference to the product in order to understand the value of creativity research (Rhodes, 1961; MacKinnon, 1987). Definitions of creative products frequently include references to the product’s originality, its appropriateness in solving a perceived problem, and its adequacy in meeting a need (Torrance, 1976; MacKinnon, 1987; Barron, 1988).

In addition to the above, there are approaches to the understanding of the creative product that are identified as multi-dimensional. An example of this is Csikszentmihalyi’s (1999) “systems” approach whereby creativity is seen as an interaction between the individual, the domain, and the field. The domain is the subject area (for example, music, art, writing) within which the individual

¹ He has since refined the scoring process to include a more streamlined figural form. A checklist of creative strengths allows the scorer to more precisely assess figures for creativity.

operates, and the field is the collection of experts and peers within the domain. The idea here is that the information transmitted from the domain to the individual is modified by the individual to create a new product. Then the field must select the innovation in order for it to be included and preserved in the domain. In this same work, Csikszentmihalyi has contended that creativity is only recognized as it operates within a system of cultural rules. It will not produce any sustaining innovations unless the individual enlists the support of peers; in other words, it is the community, not the individual that allows original products to manifest themselves.

The idea of generating creativity through community interaction with the individual is a variation of what Rhodes(1961) referred to as “press”. As mentioned earlier, Rhodes suggested that “taking the temperature” (p.308) of an environment and of a person’s reaction to it can help to establish a good fit between the two and lead to creative production. Koestler (1964) and Ferris (1972) equated the production of humor with a state of mind often associated with artistic creation. My research will focus on the individual’s environment as a key factor in strengthening and sustaining creativity. In particular, I will explore the possibility that a background which is remembered and described by participants as humorous---because of the duration and/or strength of humorous situations—affects the creative production of these individuals.

Understanding Humor Through the Major Theories

Modern research on humor only rarely offers the reader a concise definition. It allows us to identify several forms of humor, understand how and

why we can appreciate humor and why we laugh, become more effective producers of humor, and even take advantage of the benefits of appropriate humor. But defining the term comprehensively and to everyone's satisfaction, continues to allude us. It is simply too complex. . Humor research speaks of a concept that is greater than the sum of its parts and therefore in defiance of a truly descriptive definition. For example, Parkin (1997) stated, "I am convinced that humor depends on incongruity...that of which I have no certainty is what needs to be added to the incongruity in order that it become comic rather than puzzling, interesting, incoherent, fearsome, etc." (p. 2). And later: "I do not think it is any one thing. It appears to exist in a series of different dimensions, and it is only by analyzing each of them, in its own right, that we can approach the subject sensibly" (p. 5). We are therefore obliged to consider humor through the use of a complex system of principles and rules with which we can explain it—hence the proliferation of humor theory, as opposed to humor definition. Latta (1999) has stated that an accurate definition of humor cannot be made until "the basic humor process" has been identified. Studies often provide a multifaceted perspective on humor, inviting the reader to discover his/her own meaningful definition by combining the various elements that are thought to comprise a humorous experience (Brown & Gibbs, 1997).

Even in those works where a definition is provided, it is only as a means of pointing out the necessity of a theory the author believes will more thoroughly explain the phenomenon. For example, Veatch (1998) has referred to humor as "a certain psychological state which tends to produce laughter" (p. 161). But he

admitted that by including the word “tends”, the implication is that not all instances of humor produce laughter. This begs the question of what they do produce, thus making the definition uncomfortably incomplete. Veatch has responded to this with a more comprehensive explanation—a theory for which (as is inherent in the act of theorizing) several conditions are both necessary and sufficient. He contends that humor is perceived when individuals see a situation as violating a set of principles to which they have an affective commitment, when the perceiver views the situation as being normal, and when these two conditions are present in the mind of the perceiver at the same instant in time.

Current research offers three major theories of humor, each suggesting a condition that must exist to explain what makes a situation humorous: humor is a release from conventionality, stress, or the tendency to display aggression in less socially acceptable ways; it is a way to demonstrate superiority over others; it is a reaction to making a connection between seemingly unrelated and incompatible ideas.

The theory of relief/release advanced by Freud (1905), takes the position that humor offers us temporary relief from the rigidity with which we tend to live our daily lives. We use (or are receptive to) humor to briefly escape authoritative people or institutions under whose control we feel helpless, or to establish a momentary—but reaffirming—sense of relief in a particularly tense situation.

The superiority theory was advocated by ancient philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, and later by Hobbes (1651/ 1940). More recently, Gruner (1997) has described humor as a social phenomenon in which there is always a

“winner” (the humor creator) and a “loser” (the humor receiver). Obviously negative humor can be disparaging, prejudicial, or a way to glorify one’s social status. But according to the “winner/loser” model proposed by Gruner, even the simplest and seemingly most innocent of riddles is a subconscious attempt to express superiority by “conquering” the person who cannot answer the riddle. And if the riddle is correctly answered, the potentially “conquered” assumes the position of “conqueror”. In either case, someone wins and someone loses.

I believe that the process of perceiving, understanding, and solving incongruity, as described in the third major theory of humor, is a necessary condition not just for the existence of humor itself, but for establishing a relationship between humor and creativity. Therefore, the idea of meeting a creative challenge by “making the strange familiar” will be the theoretical foundation for my study of the role of humor in the lives of highly creative young adults.

Many modern theories of humor are based on the idea of incongruity (e.g., McGhee, 1979; Rothbart, 1976; Schultz, 1976, Ziv, 1984, 1989), and they are helpful in explaining the problem solving process of individuals who produce and listen to humor. Incongruity is the discordance or discrepancy between what one expects to happen and what actually occurs. I agree with Parkin (1997) that incongruity is inherent in all kinds of humorous situations, even those used to advance the two other theories described above. For instance, before one can “win” the humor “game” by providing an answer to a riddle, or joking about a repressive situation, one must solve the riddle, or appreciate the idea of laughing

in the face of adversity. This can only happen when an incongruity has been resolved through creative thinking.

Some Conditions for Humor

However, to say that incongruity exists in all kinds of humorous situations is not to say that every situation involving incongruity is humorous. Incongruity is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for humor. As Parkin (1997), Koestler (1964), and Ziv (1984) have discovered, in order for an event to be considered humorous there are other conditions that must exist concurrently with incongruity. Gruner (1978) spoke of an audience that finds humor in “expectations that are turned upside down” (p. 56). But an element of surprise is not enough. He stressed that the event should occur in a non-threatening atmosphere and in the presence of individuals who are receptive to providing amusement and being amused---what Ziv (1984) calls “playful readiness”. Otherwise, an incongruity can be perceived as frightening or confusing, and the receiver of humor might feel only anger at having been trapped into believing the absurd. But under the optimal conditions noted above, there is substantial research to support the idea that resolving a discrepancy between what is expected and what actually occurs is a process requiring creative thought and resulting in humor production or appreciation.

Research Supporting the Creativity-Humor Connection

As early as the late nineteenth century, research and theorizing in the area of creativity had begun in earnest. Preliminary but parallel investigations of humor production and response were also conducted at this time. But relatively

few philosophers and scientists of the time considered the possibility of a relationship between creativity and humor. Beattie (1776) introduced the idea of incongruity to explain the problem solving process of an individual listening to humor. Penjon (1891/1959), a French philosopher, was among the first to note that humor, as well as creativity, uses ways of thinking which are somewhat different from the ones involved in rational "Aristotelian" logic. He stated, "Laughter is an expression of freedom, freedom from the strict laws of rational thinking and freedom to play with new ideas" (p. 121).

In order to verify an idea that listening to and enjoying humor encourages the expression of creative answers, Ziv (1984) developed a study in which two groups of high school students listened to a funny record while two other groups took a creativity test. Then all four groups took a parallel creativity test. Those who had listened to the record scored significantly higher on the tests than those who had not, the greatest difference being on originality scores. This study could be considered problematic, however, in that the results might be due to the fact that one group had twice as much exposure to creativity testing than the other.

Koestler (1964) described both humor creation and creativity in the arts and sciences as involving a process he calls bisociation. A bisociative event is one in which a person responding to humor creates an original fusion between two incompatible frames of reference. But because making incongruous connections can also be symptomatic of artistic or scientific creativity, even psychological problems, there was still the question of how to make a distinction between creativity in humor, other kinds of creative acts, or simply bizarre

behavior. Ziv (1989) suggested that while scientific and artistic creativity make use of standard logic and psychopathological creativity makes use of faulty logic, the creativity in humor production makes use of what he called “local logic”; the logic used in producing humor is appropriate only within the limited context presented by the humorous situation. It is what Ziv called “...the special clue to humor creation” (p. 107). He added that the problem to be solved in humor cannot be worked out scientifically, as in other situations. The person responding to humor must “...accept absurdity and take momentary leave of Aristotelian [scientific] logic...” (p. 108). This is what distinguishes artistic or scientific creativity from humor production. He called this affective behavior “cognitive playfulness”, and suggested that it is closely related to what is measured on creativity tests.

Although humor continues to be socially encouraged and remains the vehicle through which creative thought is expressed in adulthood, cognitive playfulness diminishes with age as convention overtakes imagination. Torrance (1967) undertook research in which he revealed discontinuities in the development of creative thinking of elementary school children, the most severe occurring around the ninth or tenth year of life. He referred to this as a “fourth grade slump”. By comparing cultures and subcultures in different parts of the world, he found strong evidence to support the idea that the slump was a cultural anomaly, and not an inevitable part of childhood development.

Fry and Allen (1996) discussed the essential role of creative play in the lives of professional humor creators who must establish a “play frame” around

each joke before it can be recognized as humorous, not as a factual report. To most of us, these researchers say, creative playfulness is not the primary life process, but simply enhances life; to a professional humorist playfulness that is expressed as pleasure is life.

According to Ziv (1984), perceiving and solving an incongruity presents a creative challenge and, in a non-threatening environment, the enjoyment of solving the challenge is the basis for a humorous experience. This is why resolving the incongruity of a humorous event leaves us with a pleasurable feeling rather than one of confusion or danger, and it is what distinguishes the incongruity of a humorous event from that of a dangerous or tragic event.

But according to Rothbart (1996), not every incongruity in a humorous situation must be resolved in order to transform a creative “aha!” into a pleasurable “ha-ha!” She used the example of a children’s riddle: Why did the elephant sit on the marshmallow? The answer: Because he didn’t want to fall into the hot chocolate.

We are asked to solve the riddle by acknowledging first that we look for floating objects to save us from drowning and second that marshmallows will float on liquids. But we are still left with the image of an elephant afloat on a marshmallow, an incongruous situation that is never resolved by answering the riddle. Rothbart suggested another condition that must exist in order for a riddle’s answer to be found funny: we must enjoy whatever discrepancies or ambiguities remain after solving the problem.

Hallet and Derks (1998) contended that with simplistic humor, “sudden change and sheer incongruity will suffice” (p.139). But for more sophisticated humor, an incongruity must lead to a new cognitive order. According to their studies, the relative “funniness” of a humorous event is judged by the degree of match-up of unrelated ideas.

For example, in its original form, the riddle “Why did the chicken cross the road?” has as its answer, “To get to the other side.” The question leads listeners to expect anything but the obvious answer, yet this is the answer they receive. This shift in expectations is a form of simple incongruity. However, a more recent cartoon (Deering, 2004) shows a chicken looking across the road at the window of a bar where a sign reads, “Chickens drink free every Tuesday night.” The caption below the cartoon reads, “Now we know.” To see the humor here, we must first be aware of the original riddle and cartoonist’s wish for us to discover the “truth” behind an answer that had never satisfied him. Beyond this, we must also be able to anthropomorphize and acknowledge the “attraction” that the chicken will have to the bar. Thus, there are several cognitive adjustments occurring simultaneously; responding to multiple incongruities requires more sophisticated thought.

Koestler (1964) made an interesting distinction between humor response and humor creation. He viewed humor response as the lowest level of creative activity because in most cases, it involves the simple reflexive act of laughter and a sudden release of energy. But he saw humor creation as an act comparable to the highest level of artistic creation--what Ferris (1972) referred to as a “self-

transcending” process in which energy is released gradually as the creative work progresses. Regarding the difference between the consumer and the creator of humor, Koestler (1964) said,

....the person who invents the joke or comic idea seldom laughs in the process. The creative stress under which he labors is not of the same kind as the emotions aroused in the audience. He is engaged in....a feat of mental acrobatics....[that] must be distilled and sublimated. (p. 93)

There are several studies of professional and amateur comedians and their writers that substantiate the idea of humor as a tool for creative expression. Among them is a study conducted by Fry and Allen (1996) in which they interviewed several well-known comedy writers about their early lives. What emerged were stories about growing up in dysfunctional families and discovering humor as a defense against the trauma of home life. The act of discovering the humor in dysfunctional behavior was described by the researchers as one kind of creative experience, and the consequent incorporation of domestic problems into their own comedy routines as another kind.

A Description of Humor

When these various theories of humor and its connection to creativity are considered together, a multi-faceted description—rather than a definition—emerges. Humor can be described as a creative act and a sociological/psychological phenomenon that exists under the following necessary and sufficient conditions:

- 1) It must involve an incongruity---a “shift” in the expectations of the recipient.

- 2) The incongruity must be perceived as a creative challenge to be “overcome” through the recipient’s sense of the absurd, ability to think divergently, and understanding of “local logic” (Ziv, 1984).
- 3) There must be an element of non-threatening surprise inherent in the humorous event.
- 4) Both the recipient and the producer of humor must approach the subject with an attitude of “playful readiness” (Ziv, 1984)—a willingness to amuse and be amused.

Research with a Focus Similar to This Study

In addition to the theoretical models and studies discussed above, research in the following areas is particularly pertinent to the focus of my own research. They explore, as I have done, the idea of exposure to conditions that generate humor or in which humor is deliberately used to nurture other forms of creativity. However, they diverge somewhat from the purpose of my study. In one case, the conditions to which individuals are subjected are difficult or threatening. In another case, the child’s exposure to humor is a function of a specific teaching strategy. And in yet another case, researchers limited their observations to young children and adolescents.

The Background of Humorists

Ziv (1984) conducted a comparative study of professional and amateur humorists and their experiences as children. He discovered that the majority of professional humorists used humor, when very young, as a defense or coping mechanism against a difficult relationship with their parents--or against parents

who were themselves involved in such a relationship. Their traumatic childhoods provided them with opportunities to ease or avoid the pain with play and laughter. The continual need to find relief in this way facilitated their capacity for humor appreciation and production. This led to the question of whether there might be a “forcing” element at work in the lives of professional humorists which offers them no alternative but to concentrate on and perfect their humor in order to survive and eventually capitalize on their creativity (McGhee, 1979)..

Humor in the Classroom

Humor can also be encouraged through more positive interactions. Many studies have shown that exposing young children to humor through classroom teaching can have significant benefits in the creative performance when the humor is used appropriately. Hickerson (1989), discussed the importance of a humorous and stimulating physical environment which invites students to enjoy the teacher’s personality and stimulates thought and curiosity. She maintained that a classroom filled with a variety of colors, forms, and kinesthetic objects suggests an acceptance of whimsicality in teachers that students will respond to with their own form of humor. Although they stressed the importance of its “judicious” use, Bryant and Zillmann (1989) found that teaching with humor can create a positive classroom environment in which there is open communication, children do not feel threatened, and strong interpersonal bonds between teacher and student are formed. They, and several other researchers (e.g., Davies & Apter, 1980; Vance, 1987; Koestler, 1964; Holt, 1996; Gibbon, 1988) also found that humorous teaching facilitates learning and makes it more enjoyable,

particularly for students whose initial attention and motivation to learn is low. Teaching with humor can also lower stress associated with test anxiety, and open pathways to original thought. Humor has also been reported to enhance an appreciation of content in subjects as varied as human sexuality (Adams, 1974) and foreign language instruction (deMatos, 1974). Torrance (1961) and Wallach and Kogan (1965) found that children who do well on tests of creativity are not only better at creating their own humor and understanding the humor of others, but are also considered by peers and teachers to have a more playful attitude.

Humor and Imaginative Play

Humor created by individuals in later years has been found to have a theoretical link to the imaginative play of young children (Bariaud, 1989). Both “playing the game” of humor and children’s fantastical play involve the suspension of reality and the acceptance of incongruities as the truth. McGhee (1979;1980) reported research in which providing opportunities for young children to engage in fantasy thought and play tended to aid them in the creation of humor. He identified a sequence of events that established a connection between humor and creativity in children. Children who were curious and enjoyed novelty were the ones most likely to engage in fantasy. Because this fantastical thought created an incongruity with real-world situations, and because children could acknowledge it as nonsense, it was perceived by them and by others as humorous. As children began to make a cognitive connection between their production of fantasy and the humor it generated, they became more skilled in divergent thinking and thus in humor creation.

Humor in the Family

In his book The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families, Covey (1997) spoke to the importance of humor in the family as a means to self understanding and creative thought. He stressed the need for parents to actively look for evidence of and promote imagination, playfulness, and laughter within the family, something Strader (2000) referred to as the “magnetic attraction of family humor” (p. 55). Humor within the family, he said, “....heals, releases tension.... smooths the rough edges....make[s] us more human and more humane” (p. 55). He further indicated that a humorous attitude and environment in which parents are seen as warm, playful human beings, creates an atmosphere in which a young child feels free to express his own brand of humor and to expand his imagination to include other areas of creative production.

Through his study of 100 New England area adolescents, Dacey (1989) discovered that the family lives of highly creative youths differ considerably from the family lives of other youths. He recruited his study population by asking family members to describe and provide evidence of their own and other members' creative production. He then categorized these examples under four types of creativity (Guilford, 1975) and rated them on a scale from one to nine, nine being the highest level of creativity, or a product recognized at the national or regional level. He discovered that parents of the most highly creative children employed a style of parenting that didn't quite fit the descriptions of parental types that family researchers commonly recognize: the authoritarian parents who prefer to exercise complete control over their children's behavior, the permissive parents

who have little or no control and no rules for behavior, and the authoritative parents who maintain their authority in a nurturing manner. A fourth style of parenting emerged from this study in which parents were found to be heavily focused on and interested in their child's behavior, but offered no rules to govern it. Instead, they relied on modeling and discussion to instill a set of values, and expected their children to make decisions based on these values. Their disapproval of a particular action motivated their children to change the behavior. There was also greater emphasis placed on joking, trick-playing, and silliness. Families often had comical names for each other and used a vocabulary understood only by each other. When parents and children in the study were asked to rate traits as they pertained to the creative child, "sense of humor" was ranked much higher by them---in the top half---then by the comparison families.

In an attempt to identify and emphasize the qualities that define a strong family, Wuerffel, DeFrain, and Stinnett (1990) developed an instrument to measure the positive and negative ways that families use humor. They postulated that one characteristic of a healthy family dynamic is a pattern of positive communication--- a tendency to reinforce the strengths of each family member through openness, honesty, and humor. In fact, the use of humor appeared to facilitate all of the relationships that characterize strong families.

Through the use of two inventories, one of family strengths and one of family humor, they found that weaker families relied more on negative "put-down" humor---humor associated with the "superiority" theory. But stronger families used the humor of incongruity more often to maintain a positive outlook, to

express affection, and to cope with stress. Therefore, it appeared that a shared appreciation of innocent humor was a contributor to the strength of a family.

Shultz (1976) conducted a five-year study of twenty-two families in which at least one adult member of the family demonstrated a consistent sense of humor, as ascertained through a self-questionnaire, and another member of the family was between the ages of thirteen and sixteen years. The family member who filled out the questionnaire was asked not to reveal its contents for the duration of the study. During the first year of the study, the teenager, who was given only limited information about the research, was asked to give a detailed description of the characteristics of members of his/her family and to describe the atmosphere of the family as a whole; this same individual was asked to do the same again, five years later.

Shultz reported that in the first year of the study, only nine of the twenty-two descriptions included a reference to family humor, four of which included specific references to the family member who had completed the questionnaire. However in the fifth year, fifteen references to family humor were made, eight of which mentioned the “humorous” family individual in particular. The study showed that individuals may be more likely to think about and recall humorous interactions within the family as their own sense of humor matures and they develop an understanding of humor’s significance in contributing to the family atmosphere.

George Prince (1970) used the following oxymorons to describe creativity in his book, The Practice of Creativity:

...a familiar surprise...an unexpected certainty...a vital triviality
...a disciplined freedom...a predictable gamble...a difficult delight...
(p. 48)

These phrases could be used with equal confidence in describing humor. Rather than simply establishing an ambiguous connection between humor and creativity, the literature seems to support the idea that humor is a form of creativity in its own right. Not only do the same descriptors apply to humor that apply to creativity, but the same basic cognitive process of problem solving through divergent and convergent thinking is used when individuals produce and respond to a humorous moment.

CHAPTER 3: THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The Methodology: Qualitative Research and Phenomenology

A qualitative research design is one that explores “the ways different people make sense out of their lives” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 32). It does this by means of several strategies that include the non-intervening study of a process in its natural setting and the unique role of the researcher as the key instrument of data collection. This type of research focuses on the essence and interpretation of processes (Merriam, 1991). The researcher seeks answers to the questions of “How?” and “Why”. It is both an interpretative and an inductive process of analysis. Qualitative studies are grounded in the philosophical construct of phenomenology. A phenomenological approach to research will explain the meaning and significance of a “lived” experience, rather than predict it; it will also help the researcher come to an understanding rather than solve a problem (Patton, 1990).

Phenomenological methodology guided my choice and use of methods during this study. Phenomenological inquiry attempts to put aside familiar understandings of the world through the use of a very specific analytical framework. Key steps within this framework include becoming aware of, if not suspending, personal judgment regarding the target of inquiry; bracketing, or removing incidental or trivial information to reveal the essence of the experience, and structurally synthesizing the experience by clustering invariant themes (Moustakas, 1990; Patton, 1990). The objective is for the researcher to immediately engage with phenomena in an environment that is relatively free of

pre-existing interpretation (Crotty, 1998). In other words, the researcher is expected to look at things from a “fresh” perspective. The concepts of humor and creativity, both alone and association with each other, are complex even in their simplest interpretation. Therefore, the phenomenological approach seemed the best fit for this research.

Theoretical Framework

An interpretivistic and symbolic interactive approach informed this study. Interpretivism is a theoretical framework within which the researcher seeks to understand how people make meaning of their experiences through their culture. Symbolic interactionism takes this idea a step further with the assumption that people act toward objects, people, or events on the basis of that meaning (Blumer, 1969). In other words, we do not simply react to stimuli; rather our actions are guided by our interpretation of people or situations. Social interaction involves some form of symbolic communication, such as speech or body movement, which must be interpreted. For this reason, symbolic interactionism can be said to embrace empirical study; the researcher must enter the situation and pay careful attention to overt behaviors and settings in order to understand how others modify meaning based upon their own experience (Schwandt, 1997). I was interested in discovering whether the meaning my participants made of humor, as defined by their culture, played a role in their creative production.

Methods and Procedures

Qualitative research involves unique approaches to investigating phenomena, with the researcher playing a central role. The following information focuses on sample selection, issues of confidentiality and consent, the role of the researcher, and the collection of data.

The Pilot Study

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) described a pilot study as a way to test data collection methods, not a way to collect data. Pilot study participants should understand from the beginning that the researcher will be looking for information that not only relates to the topic of research but that will also help the researcher modify the interview questions and, if deemed necessary, the conditions under which future interviews take place.

In order to get a sense of what kinds of questions generated the types of responses I was looking for, I talked casually with the college-aged daughter of a friend who described her as talented in music and creative writing. We met in the comfortably neutral setting of a large, local bookstore and sat at a table in the back of the store.

I used this initial interview as a way to test the language and substance of my questions and my approach to questioning. Patton (1990) describes dichotomous response questions as those that are asked in “interrogation” style, rather than as part of a conversation. Respondents are often unsure if a simple yes or no is sufficient or if they are expected to elaborate. My interview guide contained questions that were truly open-ended but I felt compelled to ask the

questions in more than one way in order to further “clarify” them. So, they were immediately followed by a dichotomous response question which elicited a very brief answer. I found that the only way to “save” the question and generate a more elaborate response was to use a prompt such as “Tell me more about this”. Therefore, the primary value of this pilot study was in helping me to not only refine the interview questions but to recognize and restrain my tendency to “undo” the in-depth nature of a detailed answer.

In addition, this was an opportunity to discover whether an interview setting that I described as “comfortably neutral” from my perspective is one that my pilot study participant, as a representative of future interviewees, found to be conducive to conversation. We talked briefly about this after the interview. To the question, “What are your feelings about this as a place to have interviews with other study participants?” she responded, “It’s okay because it’s pretty quiet, but I feel that maybe people who are looking at books [on the nearby shelves] could be listening to us.” Her answer informed my decision to conduct all other interviews in settings where we would be assured of complete privacy.

Selection of Participants

Patton (1990) and Merriam (1991) discussed the importance of a few well-chosen data sources as providers of significant themes or patterns. Subsequent data can then serve the purpose of confirming or validating these themes. Therefore, it was necessary to interview a sufficient number of individuals in order to see patterns emerge. However, it was also important for the number of participants to be small enough to allow me to focus on the greater depth and

broader range of individual experience that defines a phenomenological approach. For this study, I collected data from six individuals.

The population sample for this study was determined by a nonrandom sampling strategy referred to as purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990). Purposeful sampling focuses on small samples selected intentionally. It assures the selection of participants who can provide information that will illuminate the questions under study. More specifically, I employed criterion and maximum variation sampling (Patton, 1990). Criterion sampling is simply the choosing of participants who meet some predetermined criterion of importance to the study. Maximum variation sampling is a method used to increase the heterogeneity in small, nonrandom population samples. In this case, I maximized variation by selecting individuals who were pursuing one of four areas of study. According to Patton, “any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experience” (p. 172).

Individuals selected for this study had to meet two criteria. First, they were recently graduated and working in a position directly related to their major course of study, or they were full-time college students who were either graduates or in their senior or junior undergraduate year. Second, they were recommended by current or former professors who recognized in them a high level of creativity in their major area of study (this is explained more thoroughly below). I was reasonably assured that individuals meeting these criteria were secure in their choice of fields in which to continue their chosen profession or their course of study.

I also collected gender, age, race, and ethnicity information and explained to my participants that this would be used to assist in making a comparative analysis and to help me understand more about them.

Participants were identified through the use of a short recommendation form that was distributed to their major instructor or advisor (see Appendix A). Recommending instructors were given information that helped them make a distinction between highly skilled and highly creative individuals. The form requested that instructors provide students who they believed fit the criteria with information for contacting the researcher.

In developing this form, I gave great consideration to the major creativity theories mentioned earlier. I felt that students who engage in some combination of cognitive processes described by creativity researchers would very likely produce work that was viewed as highly creative. I placed particular emphasis on Guilford's (1959) four components of creativity, as I felt that these could best serve as the basis for comparison—and therefore selection—of potential participants. However, I also included a request for a rating of “degree of task persistence” so as to get a sense of whether individuals have experienced something akin to Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) “flow”.

Participant Confidentiality and Consent

I obtained the informed consent of students either at the time they were approached to participate in the study or before the initial interview session. Confidentiality was ensured through the use of pseudonyms, member checks,

and secure storage of computer discs, interview tapes, transcripts, and other documents (see Appendix C).

The Researcher as an Instrument of Research

As the principal investigator, I had to be aware of the role that my own background and beliefs could play in “modifying” the course of this study. The way that people respond to humor or anticipate the effects of their own humor upon others has always been a source of fascination to me. I believe that humor can play a powerful role in people’s lives, often without their knowledge. I think of it as a survival instinct that keeps us not just living, but truly “alive”. This positive personal perspective has provided incentive for my research. I have an ongoing interest in exploring a possible connection between individuals’ exposure to humor and their creative development.

Assumptions. Nevertheless, I moved into my study with the idea that because I was researching a social phenomenon that is generally not thought of as a problem in need of correction, my efforts would not be taken as seriously as I would like. It was important for me to consider my feelings about how others viewed my research topic. Certainly, there is an air of frivolity that underlies even the most serious study of humor. Even as I discussed my research with friends and colleagues, I wondered if they would see it as an important contribution to the field of educational psychology. I had to be aware of my own insecurities about the significance of my research topic before I began to interact with my participants.

I have grown up with all the benefits humor can provide, and few of the drawbacks. I have also seen firsthand the enthusiastic responses to teaching with and about humor. Therefore, one of the strongest biases with which I entered this study was the belief that humor not only has a powerful influence in the lives of children and adults, but that this effect is always a positive one. Yet it was the very nature of this effect that was the focus of my investigation; I had to be sure that I was not leading respondents to react favorably to the role that humor plays in their lives when, in fact, they did not perceive it this way. In other words, I had to be careful not to approach this study under the assumption that my research questions had already been answered.

As I followed my participants' leads in order to develop the next prompting question, it became difficult even for me to remember that my focus was on humor's role in the development of highly creative individuals, not highly humorous individuals. For this study, it was necessary to ask about evidence of humor in their work to establish a perception of their own sense of humor. However, this line of questioning may have inadvertently led respondents to conclude that a humorous background was a necessary factor in their creative production, even if they initially believed it was not.

I also had to be aware of my tendency to use humor throughout a conversation, under the assumption that this was a good way to reduce levels of stress for both the interviewee and myself. Although some humorous exchange was appropriate for defining an initial level of comfort and good rapport, I had to

be certain to temper this as we proceeded, so as not to detract from the serious purpose of the interview.

My assumptions about the gender- and culture-specific aspects of humor were also a subjectivity. I tend to think of females as more overtly responsive to humor and males as more reticent. Parenthetically, this bias is out-of-character for me because I grew up surrounded by male relatives who both initiated and enthusiastically responded to humor. However, there was the possibility that I might inadvertently focus on and perhaps encourage female participants, with the expectation that they would be better at recollecting and describing humorous moments. In addition, I have observed or initiated humorous exchanges in culturally diverse settings, and have been led to believe that there are clear cultural distinctions with regard to the perception of humor. I had to be careful not to undertake the interview process with preconceptions and to make a strong effort to understand creativity and humor from other perspectives.

Finally, I had to consider the most basic assumption guiding this investigation, which was that participants were telling the truth. This was particularly important when their responses began to focus more specifically on humor. A gradual convergence toward the humor-oriented questions was my assurance of truthfulness; because interviewees were initially unaware of my focus on humor, it was unlikely that they fabricated stories even when asked about the presence of humor in their backgrounds.

Implementation

After receiving approval for the study, I made personal contact with members of the visual arts, landscape architecture, education, and music departments at the University of Georgia. Visual arts, education, and music were fields of study which I believed could provide me with the strongest evidence of both creativity and humor; in visual arts and music, I sought archival documentation as supporting evidence, and in the field of education, I expected to listen to stories of creative and humorous interactions between student teachers and their students. I had a serendipitous contact with a member of the department of landscape architecture which led to the inclusion of a student from the department. By speaking personally to department faculty, my intent was to more effectively communicate my strong commitment to this study, which I hoped would encourage instructors to respond to my request.

A recommendation form was then sent to the instructors with whom I had spoken. The form explained the purpose of the study and it ensured recipients that students would be similarly informed and would be guaranteed confidentiality. It asked instructors to briefly describe what features of the student's work distinguished it from the work of other students in the department. A listing and explanation of Guilford's (1959) four defining factors of creativity guided them in making that distinction. Instructors then asked the selected students to contact me for further information.

Data Collection

For this study, I employed two primary methods of data collection. The first was the use of in-depth, open-ended interviews that were guided by a collection of issues related to family background, creativity, and humor that I intended to explore through questioning during the course of discussion. The order and wording of questions were not determined in advance, but instead followed the natural flow of conversation. An informal interview format of this kind allows the researcher to redirect the focus of the response as the need occurs, and has the potential for producing the richest kind of data (Patton, 1990).

I made use of an interview guide as a way to help me see the interview process as a “plan of action” (see Appendix B). To develop questions for the interview guide, I conducted a pilot study with a student who did not participate in the main study, and I selected from this interview the most productive questions in terms of uncovering previously unexamined issues and ensuring participant comfort. The pilot study allowed me to develop open-ended questions, which are those that allow respondents’ answers to take any form or direction to represent what they have to say (Patton, 1990) and encourage them to elaborate.

I conducted all interviews for the main study on the university campus or at a mutually agreed-upon location. After a brief rapport-establishing conversation, an interview session of approximately one hour was conducted. At the conclusion of this session, I gave participants the opportunity to provide, via electronic mail, additional information that they felt would be relevant to the study, and asked them to obtain samples of their work, including products that

they felt reflected a form of humor. I received no responses to this, even after repeated requests.

Participants received a copy of their transcripts and were asked to review them for accuracy. They were contacted by electronic mail a short time later and encouraged to supply information that they wished to add upon further reflection.

The second source of data was a retrospective collection of interview summaries, each recorded in a journal on site, directly after our conversations. Meloy (1994) believed that journals can provide “a solid link to the many simultaneous levels of experience...in...qualitative research”, and “a place where the research focus and the role of the researcher meet methodological and analytical concerns” (p. 60). She referred to the experiences of correspondents who kept journals at various stages of the dissertation-writing process including that of a student who decided to keep “a journal in which I write up accounts of initial contact and interviews” (p. 61).

My journal was essentially an “observation” of words rather than actions, and served as a first opportunity to respond to the voices of my respondents. The information contained therein also helped me recollect and visualize the details that would become essential elements in creating portraits of each study participant which will be presented in Chapter Four.

During three of the six interviews, participants showed me actual samples or photographs of artistic work, project assignments from classes, and work that they felt exemplified their creative thought. This material became a source for prompting questions and acted as a stimulus for reflection. However, I did not

have an opportunity to discuss these archival samples more thoroughly during a follow-up interview, nor did I view material from all participants. For these reasons, I did not apply a separate analytical method to the samples, but instead considered them to be additional data that could be incorporated into the participant portraits and the analysis of interviews.

Method of Analysis for Interviews

For this study, I performed an inductive analysis of the content of six interview transcripts. Inductive analysis is an approach in which data is classified according to the research-related concepts or themes inherent within it. As do virtually all forms of qualitative analysis, the inductive approach focuses on coding as a first step.

Coding is a method outlined by a number of qualitative researchers (e.g., Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Ryan & Bernard, 2000) in which transcribed material is broken down into “chunks” of text which are selected and named in order to discover conceptual relationships among them. Related items can then be grouped together under broader categories. Sources for themes can come from the available literature, professional definitions, and personal experience. A secondary benefit of coding is that it provides the researcher with some provisional answers to research questions and information that may lead to further questioning of the data. And because it is a first step, it helps the researcher avoid the tendency to make analytical “leaps” (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

As themes emerged, I used the constant comparative method, described by Glaser and Strauss (1967), in which I collected, categorized, and synthesized data concurrently, beginning with the first interview and continuing throughout the collection process. My analysis eventually reached a point of saturation at which no new themes were revealed and all subsequent data appeared to fit well into categories I had already created. The following is a summation of this process.

I began by playing the audio tape of each interview several times, shortly after it was conducted. This initial close listening session helped me begin to develop a stronger sense of the personalities behind the voices and resulted in the interpretive journal record of each conversation, as mentioned above.

A close reading of each interview transcript allowed me to code portions of text by creating categories that addressed the focal topic of that portion of text. I was able to merge information from all transcripts into a simple taxonomy consisting of five categories: Family Background, Academic Background, Source of Background Humor, Sources of Creative Inspiration, and Making a Connection (between a humorous background and creative production).

After a second close reading across transcripts, I could see that each main category could be subdivided. For example, “one-parent” or “supportive parent(s)” could be subsumed under “Family Background”. I gave each subcategory a letter code. I then extract quotations from each transcript and placed them under the main category with a notation of their placement under a subcategory to which I believed they had the strongest thematic connection. Each quotation was assigned one or more thematic phrase that best expressed the

“sentiment” behind it. For example, under “Sources of Creative Inspiration”, I placed the quotation, “...the airport...is an inspirational place for creative ideas...it’s a massive building filled with craziness.”, and then added the letter “W”, which stood for “people-watching”. Quotations provided a richer version of the data because key concepts remained in context (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Removing quotations from the body of the transcript also facilitated my search for common themes.

Finally, I manipulated the analytical process to produce one additional effect. I focused on a single transcript and listed all quotations under the interview question that generated them; I did this for each transcript. For example, the “Veronica” interview code list began with the question, “Tell me about your family life.” “I’ve lived in a two-parent household and I have one sister,” was one of several quotations listed under this question. This process allowed me to compare answers to the same questions as I continued my analysis across all transcripts. I also began to see how the main focus of each question might be modified to create a thematic category.

Portraiture: A Presentation of Data

Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis’ book entitled The Art and Science of Portraiture (1997) described portraiture as a form of narrative inquiry in which empirical description is combined with aesthetic expression to create a written representation of study participants. The researcher records and interprets the perspectives and experiences of participants, documenting their knowledge. The cultural and social context within which stories are told, including the positive

presentation of a character description of the participant at the time of the interview, is also a source for understanding (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). In portraiture, as in the creation of other kinds of narratives, it is the researcher's task to structure a series of coherent events that have a beginning, middle, and end—in other words, that move through time (Riessman, 1993).

Because it relies on close observation and in-depth interpretation of stories, portraiture is a valuable way of connecting the researcher to the topic under study. But this method also requires that the researcher step back and establish a broader view of a single narrative as part of a collection of stories that will ultimately provide necessary and relevant information (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

So, portrait writing is a method by which emergent themes can be traced and merged into an aesthetic whole, leading to new or clearer insights for the researcher, participants, and others who read their portraits. This in turn can lead to changes in life styles and philosophy (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). In fact, an important affective goal of portraiture is to ensure that the participants feel that their portraits offer them a sense of identity, at least within the context of the research.

How individuals recount their histories—what they emphasize and omit, their stance as protagonists or victims, the relationship the story establishes between teller and audience—all shape what individuals can claim of their own lives. Personal stories are not merely a way of telling

someone (or oneself) about one's life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992, p. 1).

Portrait writing is a natural fit for my research style; the essential elements of each portrait come from retrospective summaries of our conversations that I recorded in a journal shortly after each interview. I discovered that as I described these individuals, my tendency was to add some interpretive commentary as it occurred to me. Thus I immediately began to uncover thematic connections among my participants' responses, and the journal facilitated this process with each successive interview. This strategy of "constant comparison" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is an integral step in qualitative research.

At the juncture where analysis begins, portrait-writing offers readers an opportunity to become familiar with the character types and information that generated my findings, and they allow me to hear my participants' voices more clearly.

Trustworthiness: Research Validity and Reliability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that the criteria for establishing trustworthiness in a naturalistic (qualitative) study differ from those used within the conventional (quantitative) paradigm. Their premise is that terms such as validity, reliability, and objectivity, are defined within the context of linear causality or, in the case of objectivity, with the researcher rather than the data in mind. They suggest a set of four more appropriate criteria which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. They also suggest a range of strategies that will increase the likelihood that these criteria will be met during the

course of the study. I had difficulty maintaining contact with my participants after the initial interview session; I was therefore unable to meet the requirements in all four areas, particularly those areas in which ongoing contact with participants was essential. However, I did include the following strategies at every stage of the research process.

I made audiotapes of all interviews, and transcribed them verbatim. Each of my participants was sent a copy of his/her interview transcript and asked to review it for inaccuracies. This “member check”, helped ensure that the data had a high level of credibility. Obtaining further reactions from participants would also verify that my work was reflecting the “inside” perspectives of my participants, rather than my own perspective as an outsider. It would also help identify data that could be problematic for ethical, political, or other reasons. I received positive responses from three of six participants, and all confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts.

I was ready to acknowledge my own biases and subjectivities and to clarify assumptions about the study prior to my analysis. To ensure that I would understand the data from the participants’ perceptions and not my own, I asked a colleague to listen to me explain my study and the reasons for conducting it, and make predictions about what the study would reveal. This process, introduced by Husserl, the founder of phenomenology (cited in Crotty, 1998), is referred to as bracketing. It describes the act of suspending ones’ knowledge and presuppositions about the world in order to allow the data to remain “untainted”

by the subjectivities of the researcher. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended a similar process, called peer debriefing, as a way to strengthen credibility.

These same authors also suggested that the use of thick descriptions allows the reader of a naturalistic study to consider whether data can be generalized—or in naturalistic terms, transferred—from that study to another. A thick description can be defined as one in which the writer (or orator) goes beyond the physical description of objects, events, or people and works from within his or her cultural context to provide a greater variety and number of underlying meanings for them (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). The use of portraiture offers more than just a physical description of my participants. Their behavior, their words, and even the conditions under which we spoke, all aided in revealing the fundamental natures of the personalities with whom I worked.

In addition, I acknowledged and discussed the limitations of this study. Making readers aware of what information, people, or places were unavailable to me allows them to make interpretations in light of these missing elements and, I believe, adds to the study's trustworthiness.

Limitations of the Study

As with all qualitative studies, this study is meant to be descriptive and indicative of specific relationships between respondents and others. Qualitative research involves collecting information from a relatively small number of individuals; therefore, the reader must determine whether the study information offers a good fit with, and is transferable to, a larger population. Additionally, participants were selected under the assumption that the instructors who

recommended them had a clear understanding of the difference between “highly skilled” and “highly creative” students. The possibility existed that despite the descriptors used in the recommendation form, some instructors did not make this distinction and recommended students who have high ability in their area of interest but are not truly divergent thinkers.

Another significant barrier is the general lack of acknowledgment of humor as a legitimate affective force in an individual’s development. This factor may have dissuaded instructors from taking the study seriously and may have been at least one reason for the small number of responses I received.

As in any study in which participants are asked to respond to a series of open-ended questions, there was always the chance that they supplied information that they felt was expected of them rather than that which most accurately describes their experiences. If participants felt strongly obligated to satisfy the researcher, it is possible that they fabricated an experience or established false connections between that experience and creative production.

Once having discovered that humor was the focus of this study, participants may have been compelled to create a nonexistent relationship between the humor in their backgrounds and their current creative pursuit in an effort to tell the researcher what she wanted to hear. To minimize this possibility, I did not make specific reference to humor in the participant consent form, and I asked a series of very general guiding questions during interviews, letting the topic of humor “evolve”—to the extent that it did—as the interview proceeded. In

this way, I hoped to avoid leading the participant to make a humor/creativity connection where none existed.

In a similar vein, I discovered that asking participants whether they connected their humorous backgrounds to their high creativity was often interpreted as a question about whether they saw evidence of humor in their work. I had to carefully phrase the question so that respondents would understand my interest in humor's role in all creative production, not just or necessarily humorously creative production.

Finally, despite my attention to the wording of questions, a few participants perceived my use of the term "humorous background" or the phrase "humor in your life" as an allusion to the more all-encompassing, happy, positive atmosphere of a warm, supportive family or circle of friends. But in order to provide me with the information I was looking for, these individuals would have had to understand my reference to an atmosphere in which laughing, joke-telling, and silliness were remembered as a dominant and consistent factor in social interactions.

CHAPTER 4: A DESCRIPTION OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Veronica

Veronica was a student teacher working on a Music Education degree during her senior year at the time of our first interview session. She presented an appearance in accordance with her role as a first-time instructor: neat and attractive, bordering on conservative. A twenty-one-year-old Caucasian, she had no distinguishing “look” that might cause students to focus attention on her appearance rather than on her instructions. She was receptive to the idea of being interviewed, and appeared relaxed and confident when we met in an empty classroom at the elementary school where she worked. She responded to my questioning in rote fashion throughout the interview, in a pleasant and cooperative manner. There was a distinct lack of enthusiasm in her answers; it seemed as if she were responding only as a courtesy to me, and not perceiving our conversation as chance for reflection. She had some difficulty elaborating; there are long pauses at the ends of short responses, prompting me to re-phrase a question or move on to another. In fact, no information was proffered without some form of inducement from me. Veronica lived with her parents and an older sister. She told me that at around the age of seven, she developed an interest in music after watching a violinist on television. Her sister and mother played piano, but she insisted on violin lessons. She played violin from the second grade

through middle school and explained that it was during this time that "... I grew the most in my musical experience." The lack of an orchestra program in high school forced Veronica to focus on the flute, an instrument she began playing in the sixth grade. She joined the high school band and continued to play the flute through college. Although I had earlier asked her to recall interactions with teachers who may have inspired her creatively, it wasn't until the end of our conversation that she told me her instructors "...used humor to inspire and to motivate". This provided an opportunity for further questioning, but Veronica was becoming increasingly more restless and her responses less reflective; I chose not to continue. If at some point in our conversation she had a sudden realization that my focus was on humor, she didn't indicate this with an observable change in demeanor. She could offer no documentation of her creative work in music.

Kaitlin

Kaitlin was a student teacher working on a degree in Art Education during her senior year at the time of our interview, to which she agreed without hesitation. We met in my classroom on a weekend, which explained her more informal appearance. She had the look of a stereotypical female college student: a fresh-faced, twenty-two-year-old, with an attractive, slim figure clad in a sweater and jeans, dark hair pulled back in a ponytail. She appeared quite self-assured and stress-free as we began. She answered questions in rote fashion at first, but as the interview proceeded, she relaxed and moved away from concise answers to more reflective ones. Nevertheless, she elaborated only a few times, and I was compelled to ask many prompting questions. Kaitlin's parents divorced

when she was very young, and both remarried. Before her move to the university, she lived with her biological mother and stepfather, her brother, who she later described as “smart”, but “not respectful and not responsible”, and two stepsisters. Her stepfather’s extended family lived across the street.

Kaitlin told an interesting story about how she was diagnosed with a learning disability in the first grade, but upon reviewing her test scores, “...my teacher said, ‘Oh, never mind, I was totally wrong...I don’t know if the teacher just didn’t know how to deal with me...’”. She entered her school district’s gifted program shortly thereafter, taking advanced classes through high school, and becoming jointly enrolled in college classes. She began college with thirty hours of credit. “I’ve always been told I was smart”, she told me, “but I didn’t necessarily always feel that way.” When she was asked to recall some creative experiences that affected her more strongly than others, she responded as follows.

I just remember that I would always have different solutions, like if we had an assignment where we had to do a visual, maybe someone else would go cut something out of a magazine, but I always drew my own thing for my visuals. And I know that I could never explain math to anyone else because I thought of it in a different way...I think the way I explain things to people, they don’t ever get it.

She brought several photos of her art work which we reviewed together after the interview. One photo in particular attracted my attention. It was of a painting of a series of television remote controls each on top of a series of “TV

Guides". Its message, she said, was that we have too many choices with regard to what television shows we watch and what remotes we buy to watch them.

Walter

At interview time, Walter was a physical education and reading teacher at an elementary school. We arranged to meet in the parking lot of his out-of-town apartment complex. Walter was an attractive, twenty-four-year-old Caucasian man of average height and build, with sandy hair and wire-framed glasses. His parents were still married and he had an older married brother. He said the family moved from state to state when he was young. As a "new kid" in an already-established Delaware neighborhood, he experienced some social problems on the bus ride to school: "I was bullied through the seventh grade...there was a long gap where I was having such a difficult time with bussing, being picked on...[I] was just trying to survive this part." But the encouragement he received from teachers raised his self-esteem and allowed him to find an outlet for his creativity, particularly in the areas of language arts and drama. He described his father as "...very strict. We are totally different personalities...he's very 'Type A'...everything is time and left-sided." He described his brother in a similar fashion, and explained that this, and his father's heavy traveling schedule, may have been the reason he confided more often in his mother.

When I walked through his apartment door, I immediately noticed that every available surface in the living room and kitchen was cluttered with a variety of seemingly unrelated products. But he pushed things aside at the dining room table to accommodate my interview materials. I later discovered that much of the

clutter, including that on the kitchen counters, was related to his interests and hobbies. Walter's responses were highly elaborative and insightful from the beginning. There was a feeling of "anti-Machismo" in his demeanor; he appeared to be a sensitive, personable, and unpretentious individual. He was involved in many creative activities and projects not directly related to his career; visual arts, invention, and cooking were among them, and he spoke enthusiastically about these extra-curricular activities. From the moment the interview began, it was clear that Walter was an individual who spent a great deal of time involved in activities that stimulated his inventive imagination.

After the interview, he showed me a portion of his creative work, which consisted of: a poem, thanking his parents in a sarcastic way; photos of several ornate ceramic vases; a lesson plan for an aerodynamics activity featuring some thought provoking questions; a list of "Things That Will Help People Have a Better Day", which include juggling and walking backwards in a hallway; a list of forced relationships, as in "How is a ___ like a ___?"; detailed close-up sketches of the heads of fishes; a list of ideas to keep kids in bed at night, including giving them a pet and redecorating the bed; an essay about the adventures of "Tacky Paper", his website character; a list of "Things to Do to Keep People Talking About You All Day", such as asking for specific measurements of condiments at a fast food restaurant; several sticky memo papers, each with a brief description or name of a potentially new invention such as a sanding toothbrush or a weighted whiffle ball.

Rue

Rue, a twenty-two-year-old attractive Caucasian brunette, was a student teacher who was working on her Art Education degree during her senior year at the time of our interview. She described her parents as “happily married”, her family as “very caring and loving...very supportive...”, and went on to describe her older brother in idealistic terms.

We’ve always socialized and hung out to the point of being friends, going to the movies, shopping together, and running errands. We loved to be together...talking and hanging out...he’s always had older friends that have taken me along. I used to go out to visit him at college...[and] he would visit me, and we’d spend a day at the beach. [We both] played sports when we were younger...

She was immediately agreeable and enthusiastic when approached about being interviewed, and we met in the classroom of her lead teacher after school hours. When the interview began, she showed no outward signs of unease, and her answers were eloquently phrased and moderately elaborative; she often volunteered additional information in response to a question without further prompting from me. From our conversation, I learned that Rue was dyslexic, but that this learning disability was identified and addressed very early in her academic career, resulting in a “straight A” undergraduate grade point average. Working closely with supportive teachers in a private school setting, she said, helped her through some difficult years.

She told me she was “always creative”, and had always loved to draw and paint. With support from teachers, she entered competitive art shows as early as the second grade, and took summer art classes at a prestigious school for the arts.

Rue had no documentation of her work with her, but offered to provide this at a later date. She made no connection between the humor in her own background and her current creative work. In fact, she saw most of her work as evolving from “darker” moments in her life.

Moe

Moe was a graphic design major in her junior year of college at the time of our interview. We met at the university library. She had striking, exotic features and impressed me as being quite beautiful. She was twenty-one and, as I discovered from our conversation, the child of Japanese and German parents who were still married. She had an older brother with whom she was “close”. “He would be there if I wanted to ask him anything”, she said. “He would just do the little things, like take me places and he didn’t have qualms about taking care of little sister.” She described her neighborhood simply as “nice”, and had some difficulty remembering specifics about her childhood. She told me, “I just kind of remember moods, I guess. I was happy.”

Although she was younger than the student teachers I interviewed, there was an air of sophistication and complexity of thought that distinguished her conversation and made it seem as if I was talking with an older individual. I noted that she chose her words carefully, pausing to select just the right phrase.

Her responses were concise, but infused with emotive and metaphorical language.

In a pre-interview electronic mailing, Moe reveal her interest in environmental activism; this interest was confirmed at beginning of our interview.

I've been battling between taking an art major or an environmental activist major. I kind of wanted to combine the two...use my art in society to change things...I'd like to use graphic design so that I could be part of some organization that is socially responsible with the graphic design that they do.

She remembered a time when people noted a "creative sense" in her, but she never felt different from others. "What I do remember", she said, "is that I would find creative ways to conserve my materials and use scraps...so I guess that led to the creative aspect of what I made."

We talked briefly about her "off and on" relationship with her parents and her need to make a departure from them by moving away to college. Our interview was shortened to somewhat less than an hour due to a prior appointment Moe had made, but I sensed that she was struggling for answers at this point. We ended with a quick look through her portfolio of prints which she described as only a fraction of her work.

Johnny Binston

At the time of our interview, Johnny was a junior in landscape architecture. This was his second bachelor's degree so at twenty-four, he was older than most undergraduate students. We met at my home on a weekend. Johnny was

Caucasian, tall, lanky, and highly animated, even as we sat down to prepare for our conversation. His body language, as well as his words, indicated a high degree of enthusiasm and interest in the idea of discussing his creativity. Johnny grew up on a farm in a small southern town, an environment he described as “very receptive to exploration and curiosity.” He was the ninth child in a family of six boys and three girls, overseen by parents who he described as “fair” disciplinarians.

You didn’t joke about certain things. If we didn’t treat [our mother] like we were supposed to, we’d get in trouble, punished....if daddy said something, we did it. He disciplined us...but it wasn’t without control at all. He talked more to us than he spanked us. He really tried to do different things discipline-wise.

Several times during our conversation, Johnny revealed his views on how best to experience life. When he was asked about family interactions, part of his response was, “...we didn’t grow up as self-centered, with all the children, because we couldn’t. With that many children, it’s hard to have a ‘me, me, me’ attitude...if people are not trying to feed their egos, they can start focusing on their interests.”

He later added, “I think [its] just an attitude of not taking life so seriously. There’s no way I would have jumped around [when deciding on a study focus] so many times if I took life so seriously.”

When asked to provide a pseudonym, he immediately responded with “Johnny Binston”. He explained that his senior high school graduating class was

a small one, and everyone knew each other. Just before graduation, students had to autograph a paper which would serve as a transfer for class tee shirts. The paper was passed around the classroom, and after my interviewee signed, he noticed there was no one sitting behind him. So he made up a name—Johnny Bingston—and created a fake signature. Later, when the shirts were finished, his classmates questioned the identity of this unknown student. “When they asked me who Johnny Bingston was, I just sort of smiled”, he said. We both laughed at this story; even before the interview had officially begun, he’d already demonstrated a quick wit and a sense of mischievousness. As the interview proceeded, I noted frequent shifts in his train of thought, which he later acknowledged (“This is totally random, I’m sorry this has no organization... my thoughts are so random...”). But ultimately, his thoughts were some of the most insightful I had heard.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

In this chapter, I will describe major themes that have emerged from the collective analysis of transcripts and archival documentation. I will then provide further interpretation of these themes and of some additional findings.

The Major Themes

As a result of a qualitative data analysis, four major themes have emerged that offer important insight into my participants' perceptions of the role of humor in their creative production.

Theme One: Creativity needs a positive support system in one form or another.

In Torrance's (1980) 22-year study of creatively gifted individuals, he told the stories of high-achieving adults who were assessed as children and received either high or low creativity scores. Documentation from childhood portfolios and a follow-up questionnaire twenty-two years later revealed the extent to which these individuals had "sacrificed" or maintained their creative abilities into adulthood. Some participants were found to repress their creativity for fear of not supplying the "correct" information, or because their abilities were never acknowledged. Others found opportunities to sustain their creativity through their belief in their own endurance or through the encouragement of teachers. Torrance found that consistently creative people were "willing to play their own game, their own way (p. 156)", and that those who didn't do this would eventually suffer a diminishment of creativity.

Extrinsic support. In response to a request for information about their family and school lives, most of my respondents spoke at length about positive interactions and close bonds with family members who offered them the chance to “play their own game”. They indicated that they understood and appreciated the benefits of this support system. The following remarks from Veronica illustrated this:

My parents were always very supportive, especially through high school, and I think that’s very important. They would be at any kind of performance we ever had...[we] went through the band and the chorus and they were there at every function, helping out, they were always on our side, so we saw that. I think that helps out a lot.

Although he was not a direct source of support, it is possible that Rue’s interactions with her playful father were instrumental in allowing her to express her creativity in other areas, as postulated by Strader (2000). She remembered that, “My parents were nice enough to let me paint murals on the walls.” , and “...a high school art teacher...pushed me to go to the Governor’s School [for the Arts].”

In one case, the source of support was ambiguous. When Kaitlin mentioned that she’d always been told she was smart, she was asked if others had told her she was creative. She responded with, “I get ‘creative’ more”, but did not elaborate further.

Several participants spoke of support from instructors in public schools and college. As Walter told me, these teachers offered encouragement either through verbal interaction or through their positions as role models:

...I had a third grade teacher who was very instrumental, we did all sorts of stuff, we were able to go explore things, that's what I try to do, try to model after for my kids....

I got into some groups in high school where I was...working on a play, doing stage crew and minor acting stints. I actually ran the stage crew my senior year...there were a lot of teachers that were more involved. I had a lot of teachers that were very encouraging. One encouraged me to pursue my writing. My freshman year, I was in college prep classes and there was a big difference between college prep and honors. The honors teachers were...so much more involved...I still talk to a couple of my high school teachers.

The encouragement from the instructors...was a really good thing, and I think that built throughout college.

In addition to this, Walter's father was often absent for extended periods of time, leading him to rely more on his mother as a confidante ("My father was...traveling a lot...I talked a lot with my mom about things...she was there more than my father was...").

Johnny spoke of a strong work ethic that was often typical of farming families, and he felt this provided the support he needed to remain focused on academics.

Our parents encouraged us to work, and they always kept us busy. I wasn't restricted [to farm work]...if I wanted to go and build a tree house...I could do it. The environment was one in which we were taught to work, which I think is important...I have several friends who are very, very gifted in art or music, but I don't think they were taught how to work as children...they have all this talent, but they can't focus it towards anything because they were never taught...to finish anything. [My home] was an environment where I didn't have to worry about family concerns or conflicts. I think that it was a very supportive place to learn.

Intrinsic support. All interview texts revealed, to varying degrees, participants' self-supportive personalities. In several conversations, there was evidence of great determination and motivation, and a true passion for academic pursuits, with references to "falling in love with" or "loving" a course of study. For example, when Moe was asked what inspired her interest in graphic design, she responded in the following manner:

The sheer challenge of it...I mostly wanted to use college as a resource base so that I could just try out a whole bunch of different things...every time I started a new media, I fell in love with it. I had the thought that I could try graphic design. I was very intimidated by it, but I guess that was the attraction.

Kaitlin, too, spoke of the numerous art classes she chose to take during her public school experience. Once in college and faced with classes she wasn't enjoying, she decided that "I shouldn't take all these classes right now", and she

continued to act upon her inclination toward visual arts, “because I knew I’d always liked that.”

Johnny remembered his high school and early college experience as a time of confusion created by his passionate interest in many areas.

I liked music, I liked art, I liked sports...I just loved Spanish...when I returned to school I wanted to do what I love, and I love music...I was in a show choir,...it was the last thing I thought I’d ever do...but it’s just one of those things I felt I wanted to try just to see if I could do it I’d been in my home town, I was getting comfortable... [I thought] I needed to further my education. It’s always been hard for me to narrow down my interests...but I felt I was gifted in design and art and...I thought [this city] is a place where I could use those. While I’ve been in this degree, I’ve had the opportunity to take some graphics courses that I’ve absolutely loved. My last elective for a bachelor’s degree was a crop science course and I loved it, I absolutely loved it. I worked at a nursery...and I [thought], I really, really love the outdoors, I love this.

Walter expressed his pride in the self-motivation that eventually led to his decision to teach public school.

I was extremely dedicated, and I knew I wouldn’t be the top GPA, but I was definitely going forth with some other things and I was recognized for doing that. I really enjoyed the teaching aspect of [my athletic training program]. That was more of a challenge to me, so I went into that.

A strong belief in oneself and faith in the positive outcome of an academic

pursuit no matter where it leads, were some of the most distinctive elements of my participants' stories. Johnny expressed this particularly well.

I do not regret all the classes in speech and drama. I'm glad I had those experiences and I think...they have prepared me. Looking back, I'm so glad, I see the law students walking around...all stressed out, reading those books that have no pictures, and even though it makes no sense, and I probably won't make as much money, but there's things more important than that. [Obtaining a bachelor's degree was] a road that was very confusing, but I don't regret any of it. I've tried a variety of things, and I just consider it like a portfolio. I appreciate the experiences I've had even though I wasn't on one track the whole time.

Theme Two: Humor is an “incidental” in recollections of family interactions.

Humor seemed almost an afterthought when participants talked about their backgrounds. In only one case did a respondent make a reference to humor in her background without a prompting question from me in which I deliberately used humor-related terminology. Rue responded to a general question about the nature of interactions between members of her family during a typical evening together.

[Our family is] very fun and jovial. My dad has a crazy sense of humor. We're always laughing and joking and having a good time....we'll just sit around sometimes and discuss what's going on in our lives and joke.

She moved on to talk about other social interactions between her and members of her family but later in our conversation, I asked her to elaborate on her comment about her father's humor.

[My dad] was never going to have a family and kids. He was just kind of wild and crazy...he always has a story for everything—very witty and funny. He sees something on television, he makes a joke about it. He has a quick wit. He can turn a situation around and make it funny.

Walter's answer to a question about family interactions refers to a father and brother whose personalities are defined by discipline and regimentation and a mother who is more responsive to his emotional needs. It was only after I asked him whether he would describe his family's conversations as "serious" or "not serious", that he reflected on another aspect of his relationship with his father and brother.

Oh, definitely not serious a lot of times. My father gets upset when my mom and I discuss medical things and we joke about it. He kind of laughs, too...when we go out, we have fun...that's one thing I really like, that my dad and I work well together because he loves to go to new restaurants, loves to try different kinds of food. [I have] a very amusing family.

Weddings and family get-togethers are very unusual and fun.

When asked about the tone of interactions within her family, Veronica spoke of closeness, warmth, and support. She described in very general terms the social behaviors of families with whom her own family had a close relationship ("...we'd see adults enjoying themselves and laughing...").

Only when she was directly asked to recollect instances of humor in the family, did she offer information about her “talkative” mother, her position as the family jokester, and her love of laughter. But because she did not elaborate, there is no indication that humor played a dominant or consistent role.

As Kaitlin described her family environment, my impression was that interaction between family members was infrequent and often unproductive (“I don’t remember my [biological] dad being there. On weekends, [my stepfather] would go to the hunting camp...my mom goes out a lot, too. School...wasn’t good for [my brother]...he quit. He’s just always getting in trouble.”). Only after I asked directly about the presence of laughter and humor during family conversations, did she mentioned good-natured teasing between members of her extended family (“...all they do is pick on each other...they like you when they pick on you.”). She described her part in these interactions as, “...usually just sitting and watching.”

Moe talked about her relationship with her parents, and how their cultural differences made communication with them difficult (“There was a lot of not just miscommunication but a total lack of communication...[my parents] are culturally different and...as a kid, I thought, they’re so strange.”). When she was asked to recollect humorous interactions between family members, it was clear that this aspect was de-emphasized. She said that instances when her parents laughed were thought of as novelties (“...I always noted when [dad laughed], like he didn’t laugh too much.”). In this case, then, humor is an afterthought for Moe by virtue of its infrequent occurrence among family members.

Johnny responded with great enthusiasm when asked whether the nature of family interactions included humor although, as with other participants, this aspect of family life didn't occur to him prior to the question.

Oh, there was a lot of humor--- a lot of dry, silly humor between little kids. My dad's funny. He would wake up in the morning and sing at the top of his lungs. And he does not have a voice, he was, "Oh, what a beautiful mor...", you know. It was like my alarm clock, and it was just funny to me. [My mom] was pretty funny, too. She would always have her silly little jokes. My brothers...would tell stories about growing up...and they were just so funny...there was a lot of humor.

As illustrated in Figure 1, most respondents did not think in terms of humor when answering questions about their background interactions. Humor was simply not among the most "memorable" of interactions, whether or not it dominated the social dynamic of the individual. Therefore, a discussion of humor had to be prompted, and the presence of humor in a participant's background was acknowledged only after my reference to it.

According to Shultz's (1976) five-year study as described in Chapter Three, humorous interaction within the family became more memorable and significant as teenagers moved into young adulthood and their own sense of humor matured. At this point, they were able to recall instances of humor in the family, after being given only general instructions to tell about their family atmosphere.

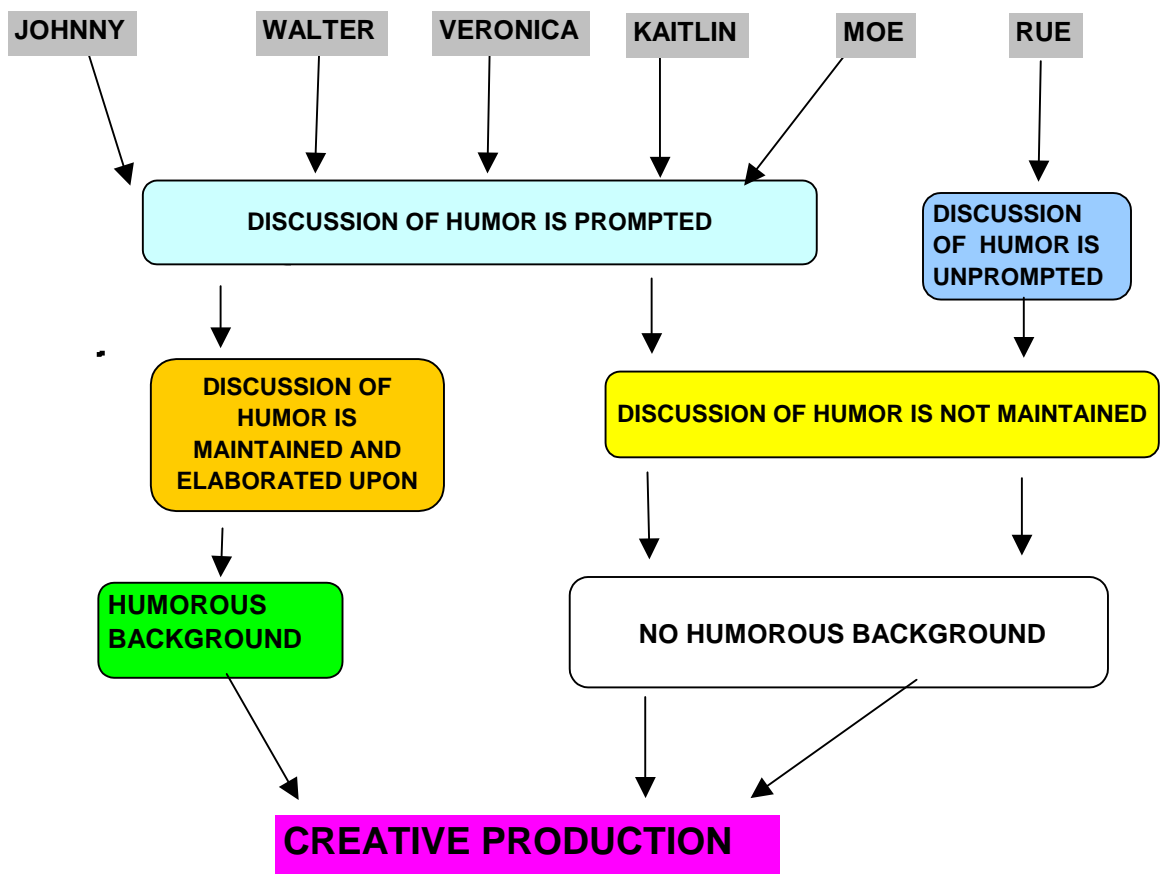


Figure 1: The Relationship Between a Humorous Background and Creative Production

However, only one of my study participants offered information about a humorous family member or instances of humor without inducement from me. The remaining participants had to be appropriately prompted before speaking about humorous influences. All of my participants were the same age or older than the young adults in Shultz's study. One factor that might explain this inconsistency is that the teenagers in the Shultz study had an opportunity to respond to the same question twice. If, five years later, they were aware of the researcher's desire to see changes in their responses, they may have made a greater effort to more fully capture the details of family interactions, including humorous ones. Also, there exists the possibility that information about the true focus of the study was revealed to the participants at some point, resulting in their additional references to humor in the follow-up question. But ultimately, this discrepancy points to the difficulty of generalizing the results of other studies to the much smaller sample population involved in this study. A larger number of respondents—and therefore a more diverse collection of background stories—might have produced results more consistent with those of the Shultz study.

Theme Three: The benefits of teaching with humor are acknowledged.

The positive role of humor in inspirational teaching—either their own or that of an individual they remember—was acknowledged by all but two respondents. However, one of the two unintentionally made a case for the use of humor. When asked if she incorporated humor in her teaching, Kaitlin expressed discomfort with the idea of joking with an “audience.”

I don't think I incorporate humor to the whole class. I think I joke a lot with

the students individually, maybe. Like when someone told me they didn't want to color their face because they're white, and I said, 'Well, you're not as white as this paper is, you're not a ghost, you know'...I don't think I'd be comfortable joking to the whole class.

But by using the humor of exaggeration, Kaitlin's quick repartee with a single student disguised a lesson about recognizing variations in skin tone. Kaitlin found a way to offer constructive critique in a non-threatening way; a strategy that could be effective for the entire class.

Walter talked about two memorable figures, one the principal at the school where he was teaching, and the other, a high school soccer coach.

[My principal and I] get along well because he's mischievous...he's been helpful in carrying out some of our pranks....I had one high school teacher who was also the playwright and the soccer coach, he was very sarcastic, always poking fun, and people told him stuff...he'd always find out the dirt on things that were going on in school and share that in a funny way.

I asked Walter if he felt this was inspirational with regard to his own teaching.

Through college, the rule was don't ever take yourself so serious... we were always having fun, and I think that's why I teach elementary now, is because they get so excited...it's just throwing some...strange, weird thing that they're not used to out at them.

In his current position, Walter could direct his fun-loving personality

toward a young and appreciative audience. His senior high school year and the college experience that followed, he said, were influencing factors in his decision to teach elementary school. He believed his students deserved to be exposed to humorous teaching, just as he was, in order to fill what he perceived as a “gap” in their lives.

I want my kids to have fun. I know that my kids...are very sheltered...which to me is very depressing. So I figure what good is it if you're not having fun doing it...those are the times when I learned the most, when I was having fun.

Rue spoke of a practical need for humor, particularly at the high school level. It was a way, she believed, to have them develop a sense of ownership with an art activity.

Humor is something you need as a defense mechanism for these kids and also as a teaching tool to make things fun and to draw them into the learning process. I have observed the teacher that I am working with...use a sense of humor to defuse a rough situation.

She mentioned that her students often created and initiated humor. She recognized the value of humor as a psychological defense and a way to enhance the learning environment. She pointed out that when instructors humorously discuss unusual art forms (“...pointing out an oddity and making a joke...”), children can more easily acknowledge that there has been (or is) some resistance to those art forms.

Rue told me that she had not made deliberate use of humor in her

teaching at either the elementary or high school level. Her high school lead teacher had done so, but in a way she did not find appealing (“...joking around with the kids and telling them to shut the ‘blank’ up.”).

Veronica, too, acknowledged the importance of teaching with humor as a motivator of learning and an equalizer, as well as a good opportunity to involve children in a more creative use of language by producing their own lyrics.

I asked them to come up with the lyrics for [a new song]...they’ll come up with really, really funny things to say....they get a kick out of themselves and they make everybody else giggle. But they don’t feel threatened like people are laughing at them...they feel good. It makes more people want to get...ideas...

Theme Four: There is difficulty in establishing a connection between a humorous background and high personal creativity.

Of the six individuals participating in this study, two acknowledged a connection between a humorous background--as this term was defined for the study--and their creative production. Another respondent used a more all-encompassing definition of humor to establish a connection. The response of another indicated an inverse relationship, and two respondents made no connection at all.

Johnny believed there was a connection between humor in his background and his creativity; his premise was that being raised in a family in which selflessness, a strong sense of identity, and a positive attitude (often in the

form of humor) was encouraged provided firm ground upon which his creativity could develop.

I think creativity [occurs when] you have a sense of belonging and confidence where you're not so self-absorbed and insecure. A good family atmosphere is essential [for this]. When you have a sincere interest or love for things, creativity develops out of interest, curiosity. I guess it all goes back to humor. I think the humor in my family created a good environment for letting the curiosity develop.

Johnny revealed aspects of his own sense of humor—and thus clear evidence of a humorous background---many times throughout the interview. One outstanding example is when he told the story of the origin of his pseudonym. The other is through faith in his decision to switch to another career interest, which he expressed in the following way:

I think I'm capable of making it through [law school], but would I enjoy it? So I decided to go with the landscape architecture...and that's where I'm at now. I've had the opportunity to take some...courses that I absolutely loved...looking back, I'm so glad, I see the law students walking around, and they're all stressed out, reading those books that have no pictures...

He also acknowledged that having a sense of humor was an effective way of coping with confusion and stress.

I think it's an attitude...maybe that style of humor, to be able to take life as it comes and laugh about it when things go wrong...and move on. I also try to find the humor in a situation, not take life too seriously.

Walter's products were infused with elements of his continuing interest in fun, mischief, and fanciful thought. Like Johnny, he referred to his own sense of humor many times during our conversation. I learned that Walter saw himself as the initiator—the “interjector”—of humor within a family that was a bit more restrictive and inflexible than he would have liked (“My father still gets upset with my mom [and me] when we discuss medical things and we joke about it...my brother is usually very serious...[his house] is very exact, everything in its place...I think that [poking fun about this] sometimes irritates my brother.”). Walter considered himself to be the “clown” to his family members’ “straight man” personas. Yet he described his family as “amusing”, which led me to believe that they provided him with a source of comedic relief. He described his sense of humor as “mischievous”, sometimes “dark”, and sarcastic, but selective with regard to others’ sensitivities to offensive humor. He also indicated that he enjoyed being on the receiving end of a more acerbic brand of humor (“...I was in one honors class...[the teacher] was highly caustic...but I loved it...I was enthralled by this...”).

When he was asked to make a connection between his creativity and the humor in his background, Walter responded that his ideas and products employed an element of fun, and that these creations were a reflection of his personality. Because he was able to “find the humor in things”, he felt he was able to use his creativity more effectively. He also acknowledged that his understanding of more sophisticated levels of humor might be responsible for the frequency and originality of his ideas.

I know there is a connection because I like doing things that are whimsical. A lot of my creative ideas come by getting humor that other people don't get...or maybe finding humor where they don't find it. I don't think I could do [what I do] if it wasn't fun or didn't have some aspect of the humorous.

Veronica assigned similar definitions to the terms humorous background, happy family environment, and creative environment, which allowed her to establish a connection— based on a misunderstanding of my question---between her background and her creativity. Her premise was that if she was happy with (read: “found humor in”) her musical talent as a child, she would pursue this source of happiness in order to remain happy (read: “become creatively productive”).

Humor equals happy. When I think of humor, generally people are laughing and they're enjoying themselves. Maybe since I was exposed to being creative at such a young age, it just exploded. I think if you're happy at some point in your life then you might stick with what you're doing just to make yourself happy. So if music made me happy when I was young, there is...a good chance I'm going to stick with that.

Veronica's explanation points out the difficulty she had distinguishing between a “happy childhood”—which can certainly include humor—and a humorous background. She remembers closeness and support within the family (“...very loving, close...family. My sister and I are five years apart, but we've never been anything but extremely close”). She also

remembered that her parents would document her humor as a child (“My mom has told me funny stories of things that I would say. She used to tape record us just talking...we’d tell silly stories...”). However as an adult, she told me, she’d become more introverted like her father. When asked about her own sense of humor, she described herself as both an initiator and a receiver who enjoys sarcasm but avoids “sick humor”. In her classroom, she was rarely the initiator of humor; instead, instances of classroom humor were created by the behaviors of the students themselves (“I don’t know that it would ever be planned as much as it just happens.”). But nothing in her response to my “connection” question indicated that she recognized a consistently influential relationship between her happy/humorous background (including her own sense of humor) and her creativity in music.

Moe’s initial response to the “connection” question indicated that she, too, might have misinterpreted “humorous background” but this time, to mean a humorous frame of mind.

I’m sure there is [a connection] ---that’s a good point. If I’m in a humorous mood while creating art, I tend to feel more spur of the moment, stream of consciousness, and it’s more spontaneous. I can think of a few pieces that were born from a very humorous mood.

But when asked to elaborate, she takes a step back to reveal what she thinks may be the original source of her creativity.

A lot of it is just certain times right before I [created a particular piece of art] that were just fun, humorous times...maybe those times...were things

that I would have never done with my parents, that they would have pretty much expected me to do...

Moe seemed to be saying that her art work reflected a “rebellious” attitude toward her parents, that rebellion taking the form of the “fun and humorous times” they might have looked upon with disapproval. Therefore, she appeared to have made a connection between the paucity of humor in her family and her creative production. She described her own sense of humor as “goofy”, but inoffensive, and added that it was important to her to retain a sense of her true identity in her humor (“...I try to make people feel comfortable around me and I definitely don’t like pretending to be somebody I’m not...”). She often used humor as a means of coping with the discomfort she felt with her parents (“...my sense of humor tended to be like making fun of mom and dad.”).

Rue described her sense of humor as “appreciative” of her father’s wit but she did not see herself as a strong initiator . Her humor, she said, was “careful”, for fear of offending people. Ongoing interactions Rue had with her father made humor a clearly-remembered component of her family life, yet in response to a question about recognizing a connection between her humorous family environment and her level of creativity, she said, “I wouldn’t say there is [a connection] ---not that I could recollect.”

Kaitlin described her sense of humor by admitting to an inability to distinguish between silliness and seriousness (“I think sometimes I take things that are jokes as not jokes.”), then as the way she responded to her boyfriend’s special “I scared someone” laugh, then as a particular reaction to her friend’s

sense of exaggeration. She responded simply with, “I don’t think so”, when asked directly if she felt that background humor had influenced her creativity. She claimed that a lack of “ownership” of humor was the reason (“I don’t...really see a connection to my art. I think maybe [humor] is not in [my art] because in my family, I’m not the person that’s making all the jokes.”). Immediately following this, she described a series of photographs she had taken that had a humorous message, which led her to refer back to this response apologetically--- she had forgotten this example of humor in creativity (“I thought the photographs were pretty funny. I left that out completely...I guess when I think of art, I go to my paintings or...ceramics. I forget about photography.”). She attributed the creation of this project to the need to relieve academic stress at the time (“I think I just needed the humor in my life because of the stress of school.”).

However, my initial question asked Kaitlin to think in more general terms about the influence of background humor on her creative ability, not about the presence of humor in an art form produced at a specific time in her course of study. The aspect of incorporating humor in work can point to either a personal sense of humor, which is consistent, or to a humorous mood, which is transient. Therefore, if individuals show evidence of humor in their work, they may not necessarily have a humorous background, as it is defined for this study.

During our conversation, Kaitlin made only a brief reference to her own sense of humor; there was no indication that humor was a strong and/or consistent aspect of her personality. It seemed, therefore, that her initial

response was a more accurate assessment of the influence of humor in her life than the production of a single humorous project.

Even if participants recognized humor, and it continued to play a dominant role in their lives, it was their personal sense of humor that allowed them to make a connection to their creativity. Interestingly, only the two male participants in this study acknowledged a connection between a consistent source of humor and their creative work.

Johnny recognized that both family and personal humor were part of the constructive atmosphere of his upbringing which in turn sustained his enthusiasm and led him to his true interest. He spoke eloquently of the importance of his family's encouragement as he pursued various academic avenues. But he acknowledged, too, that it was "that style of humor to be able to...laugh ...when things go wrong...not take life too seriously, and move on..." that ultimately led him to discover the most effective outlet for his imagination.

Walter also spoke of the importance of trying to find "...the humor in things" and, with regard to his student's work, to ..."have fun with it". "Every time I take myself too seriously", he said, "my kids are there to point out that's not the way to be." He saw his sense of humor—what he referred to as whimsicality—as a factor in providing his students with the opportunity to have fun while learning and in cultivating his own hobbies and interests.

The establishment of these connections may have their basis in both gender and culture. Castell and Goldstein (1977) performed a cross-cultural study in which they discovered that by six years of age, males not only engaged

in more laugh-evoking activity than females, but they were also the principal initiators of humor. As illustrated in Figure 1, it may be that Johnny and Walter, who saw themselves as both creators and initiators of humor, benefited more consistently from their exposure to humorous influences (including their own sense of humor), were able to elaborate upon this in their conversations with me, and would therefore have been more likely to find a connection between humor and their current levels of creativity. My impression was that they were functioning at a somewhat higher level of “philosophical maturity” than the females, at least with regard to discussing this idea. Conversely, the results of the Castell and Goldstein study may explain why none of the female participants saw themselves as (primarily) originators of humor, and therefore had difficulty maintaining a humor-focused discussion and making a humorous background-creativity connection.

During our conversations, Moe and Kaitlin spoke with enthusiasm and passion about their academic experiences, indicating a high degree of intrinsic motivation. But neither made specific reference to a source of support from family, friends, or instructors. It is interesting that for both individuals, the presence of negative humor, in the form of put-downs and teasing, surfaced as they spoke about their families.

Fry and Allen (1996) described the role of humor as a defense against a troubled home life. Moe portrayed her relationship with her parents as one in which there was a lack of communication, punctuated by “strange”, sporadic moments of humor during which she would tease her parents because of their

cultural differences from each other and from her. According to Wuerffel, DeFrain, and Stinnett(1990), “put down” humor is characteristic of unhealthy, weaker family relations. Kaitlin spoke of divorce and an “independent” mother and stepfather. Teasing each other, she said, was the primary source of humor among all family members; guests, too, were often targets for this form of humor. However, the absence of a consistent source of positive humor was not a deterrent to Kaitlin’s or Moe’s creative production. They relied primarily on the kind of support that would help them overcome the obstacles presented by their family interactions: a strong belief in the value of their education and in themselves.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to discover if highly creative young adults perceive humor in their backgrounds as an influencing factor in the development of their creativity. The method used to inform this study was a quantitative analysis of interview and archival material.

More specifically, this study sought to answer three questions about the perception of background humor. These questions were:

1. What developmental and environmental factors do study participants associate with their creative production?
2. Do participants spontaneously remember and speak of background humor or must their discussion of humor be prompted?
3. What types of connections, if any, do participants make between a strong and/or consistent humorous influence and their creative production?

With regard to the first and third questions, it seems that it was not just or even necessarily a humorous background that my study participants associated with their creativity. Instead, ongoing positive support from either intrinsic or extrinsic sources—or both-- allowed them to develop the confidence and strong self-image associated with original thinking (see Figure 2). Some participants spoke passionately about their studies or teaching experiences, providing little information about an outside support system. But the fervor with which they

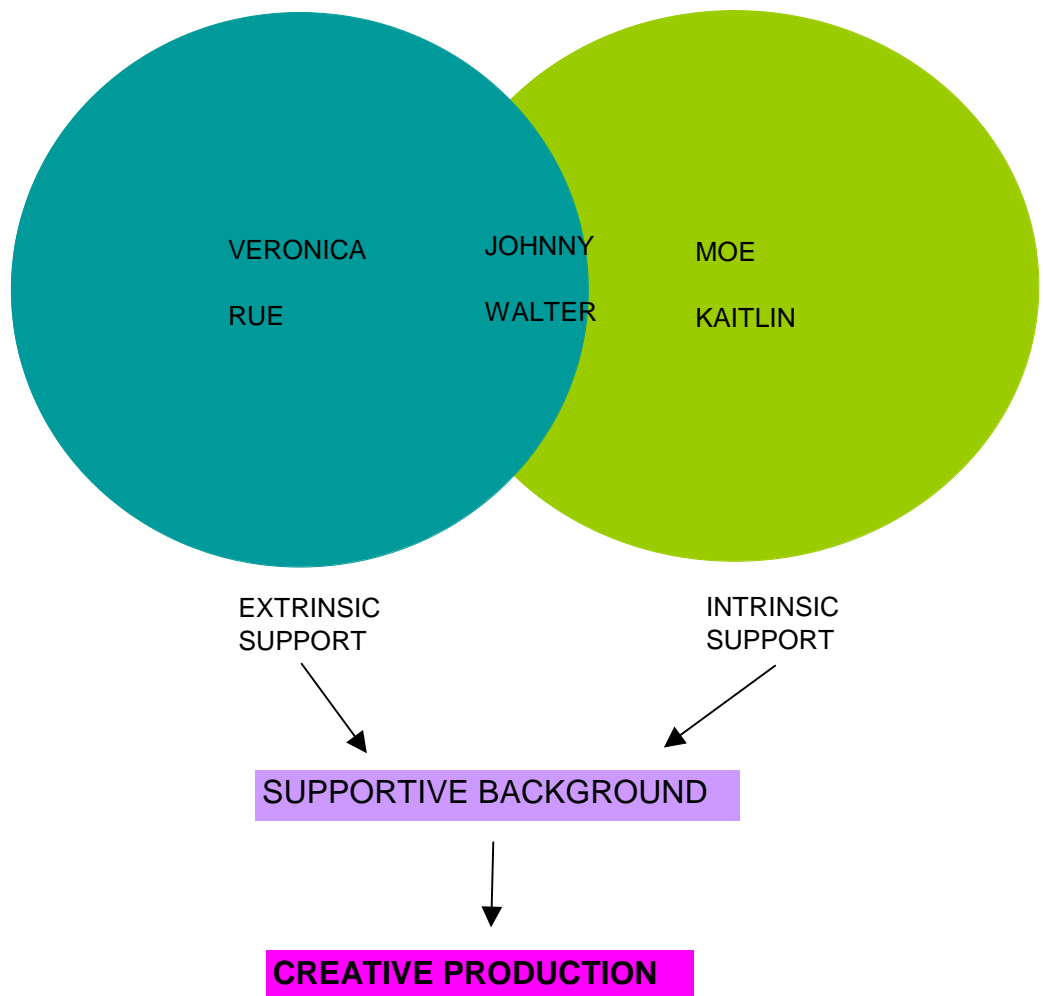


Figure 2: The Relationship Between a Supportive Background and Creative Production

pursued their interests was a form of self-affirmation. Other participants focused on family members and teachers as the primary sources of encouragement. Conversations with others pointed to the benefits of a support system that involved both a strong sense of humor and enabling families and teachers.

In any case, my participants' stories indicated that humor is a form of creativity that may indirectly inspire creative production in young adults, if it is perceived as a source of positive support. In this study, if a consistent source of humor (family humor or the participant's own sense of humor), was identified as positive support then it was perceived as being influential in—or having a connection to—creative production. In Johnny Bingham's case, both a happy, supportive family environment and a humorous outlook helped him navigate a series of “shifts” in his course of study with his self-image intact. Walter felt strongly that a sense of whimsy and fun was an essential ingredient for effective teaching and personal inventiveness.

Most significantly for this study, and in answer to the third question, humor appeared to be one of the least-considered components of a supportive background. All but one participant needed prompting to think about the role of humor their lives and for all but two, the prompt had no “lasting results” in terms of elaboration. The reason for this may have to do with age or level of maturation as Shultz's (1976) study indicated. It is possible, too, that within the time frame of an interview session, my participants were able to make a much more immediate connection between their creativity and non-humorous support from family, friends, and teachers than between their creativity and humor—even if that

humor was a relatively consistent element of their backgrounds. In other words, they were more likely to speak of a general support system than a humorous support system.

A final reason for humor's perceived ineffectual role in the creative production of most of my participants may simply be that it did not, in fact, have a significant or positive role to play. Female participants, who more often saw themselves as receivers of humor rather than initiators, would have been unlikely to make a connection between their appreciation of humor and their creativity. As Kaitlin put it, "...maybe [humor] is not in [my work] because...I'm not the one making all the jokes." Not only was Kaitlin the receiver of family humor, but both she and Moe were members of families in which a negative form of humor was used, which made it difficult to associate humor with creativity. Furthermore, because cultural resistance to using and teaching humor in the classroom still exists despite its known benefits (Brown & Gibbs, 1997; Bryant & Zillman, 1989), it is possible that many study participants were only occasionally exposed to humorous teaching during their education. This might also explain why the interviewees who were student teaching did not refer to their own use of humor in the classroom. They may be aware of an undercurrent of disapproval, particularly at this early stage of their careers.

However, since the intention of this study was to provide further evidence of the benefits of exposure to humor, the findings do not negate evidence already in existence concerning the value of humor, particularly in teaching. As many studies have indicated (i.e., Davies and Apter, Holt, Gibbon, Bryant and Zillman)

and as several of my participants have confirmed through experience, teaching with and about humor provides an incentive to learning. Loomans and Kolberg (1993) and many other educators and researchers discovered that teaching techniques which encourage laughter and play discourage the fear and self-deprecation often associated with struggling to learn new ideas. Teaching with and about humor both demonstrates creativity on the part of the teacher and offers important opportunities for children to be creative themselves---to explore the nuances of verbal and body language in imaginative and enjoyable ways. At the least, teachers who use appropriate humor deliver affirmative and upbeat messages to children within a comfortable social context; this is particularly important for those children whose home lives are less than positive. In this study, ongoing humor was, in general, not perceived as a significant contributor to creative production. But the study does make a case for a personal sense of humor as a means by which individuals can become more receptive to new ideas and more able to handle the variety of stressors that often block the road to self-actualization. If a background that includes teaching with and about humor can encourage children to create humor for themselves, it is possible that they will be better prepared to meet the challenges of highly creative production in any field of study.

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APPENDIX A: RECOMMENDATION FORM FOR INSTRUCTORS

Dear _____,

I am a doctoral student in Educational Psychology, and I am conducting a study on the backgrounds of highly creative young adults. This study is under the supervision of Dr. Bonnie Cramond, Professor of Educational Psychology, phone (706)542-4110.

I would like to interview students at the junior and senior levels who you believe demonstrate high creativity. Because it is often difficult to distinguish between students who are highly skilled and those who are highly creative, I am offering the following guiding questions which are based upon Guilford's (1959) four components of creative thinking. If in regard to a particular student you are able to answer in the affirmative to any three of the five questions, please consider this student to be a potential study participant. If the student is interested in participating, please provide her/him with my phone number or e-mail address, and retain this form. Thank you very much for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Brandis Hartsell
Phone: (706-xxx xxxx)
humor@laugh.net

Guiding Questions:

During the time you have known her/him:

1. Has this student produced a significant number of different ideas (fluency)? _____
2. Has this student produced work, on a fairly consistent basis, that is unique or distinctive (originality)? _____
3. Has this student produced work, on a fairly consistent basis, that shows s/he has added detail to or built upon the original idea or premise (elaboration)? _____
4. Has this student produced work, on a fairly consistent basis, that reflects a shift in thinking, an ability to move from one category of ideas to another (flexibility)? _____
5. How would you rate this student on his/her commitment to finishing or elaborating upon his/her work (persistence)? _____

Name of Student: _____ (for your reference only)

Guilford, J. P. (1959). Traits of creativity. In H.H. Anderson (Ed.), Creativity and its cultivation. New York: Harper.

Questions or problems regarding these activities should be addressed to Chris Joseph, Institutional Review Board, Office of V.P. for Research, The University of Georgia, 606 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia, 30602-7411. Telephone (706)542-6514, or IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Date: Time: Location: Interview Code:

Consent Form Information to Review Orally

Voluntary participation	Confidentiality of participant
Purpose of study explained	Length of interview
Permission to record	Data security measures

Guiding and Prompting Questions: The following questions are intended to encourage participants to offer information relevant to the topic being researched. The use of additional prompting questions will depend on the direction in which the conversation proceeds.

Tell me about your family and/or school life:

What do you remember about creative experiences in your background?

Were you creative as a child or teenager?

If yes: Tell me more about this (under what conditions, in what way?).

If no: Tell me more about this (reasons).

What other kinds of situations inspired your creativity?

You have been recommended by your instructor as someone who demonstrates high creativity in your work.

How do you describe your creative abilities?

What are some of the conditions necessary for you to create now?

Tell me about particular instances of humor in your childhood, adolescence, or more recently?

Tell me about your sense of humor. Where does humor exist in your life?

For instance, with family, friends, within community, to yourself, through the media?

What kinds of humor do you enjoy?

Do you see yourself as someone who more often responds to humor or provides humor?

Do you see a connection between your creative production and the presence of humor in your life?

If yes/no: Tell me about this.

Do you have examples of work for which humor provided inspiration or in which humor is used?

If yes/no: Provide and explain.

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

I give my consent to be interviewed for this research study which is being conducted by Brandis Hartsell, a doctoral student in the Educational Psychology Department at the University of Georgia, phone 542-4110. This study is under the supervision of Dr. Bonnie Cramond, Professor of Educational Psychology, phone, 542-4110. I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary; I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of my participation returned to me, removed from the records, or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

- 1) The purpose of this study is to investigate the backgrounds of highly creative young adults.
- 2) I will participate in an interview roughly 60 to 120 minutes in duration. There is the possibility of a follow-up interview lasting from ten to thirty minutes.
- 3) I understand that the researcher may ask to review personal documents or artifacts (written work, art work) only with my permission and under my direct supervision.
- 4) I understand that there are no anticipated discomforts or stress associated with this research.
- 5) I understand that there are no risks associated with this research.
- 6) All information concerning me will be kept confidential. If information about me is published, it will not be identified as mine and the researcher will utilize a pseudonym in place of my real name. However, research records may be obtained by court order. I understand that audio tapes and copies of transcripts will be kept indefinitely by the researcher for research and educational purposes. There is a possibility that audio tapes with my voice will be used in either teaching or research conference proceedings. This is subject to my permission (see below).

Use of audio records

Excerpts of my taped interview(s) may be shared during conference proceedings with other researchers. YES _____ NO _____

Excerpts of my taped interview(s) may be shared in the classroom setting for educational purposes. YES _____ NO _____

- 7) The researcher will answer any further questions about the research either now or during the course of the study.

Signature of Researcher / Date
PH # : xxx-xxxx humor@laugh.net

Signature of Participant / Date

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM. KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE RESEARCHER.

Questions or problems regarding these activities should be addressed to Chris Joseph, Institutional Review Board, Office of V.P. for Research, The University Of Georgia, 606 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia, 30602-7411 Telephone (706)542-6514, or IRB@uga.edu