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Research paper



Gender Differences in Workplace Humor Among Lecturers: Study on Whatsapp Group(S)

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Abstract

Humor is an important part of workplace communication. Among lecturers, an online chatting group, such as WhatsApp group, is a scene of humor. As well as real-world humor, gender relations also shape humor in this virtual world. This study investigated gender differences in workplace humor among lecturers on WhatsApp group(s), including the topics, the message forms, and the participants' feelings. The subjects were 15 male and 15 female lecturers from three Universities in West Java, Indonesia. The findings of this phenomenology research revealed that humor topic is the first difference. Almost all topics are applicable for male lecturers, and the most frequent ones are their colleague weaknesses, either physical or nonphysical, and sexual content. Female lecturers scarcely initiate humor talk, but they can join it. Being the topic of humor, 73% of female lecturers feel victimized, but only 60% of male lecturers feel the same way. There are 40% male lecturers who feel proud to be the object of humor, because it increases their personal attractiveness and relations as well as their popularity. Female lecturers can freely laugh at her male colleagues' weaknesses, but not vice versa.

Keywords:*GenderDifferences;WhatsAppGroup;Lecturer;Humor*

1. Introduction

Wherever a group of humans exists, humor exists. Without humor, our life will be tasteless. Without humor, life would be unbearable (1). Humor insinuates itself into every aspect of human lives and sometimes to the people that perhaps do not want it. Humor not only can be found in daily conversation, but also in the film we watched in cinema, the television in our living room, in the books we read, in our daily newspapers, in magazines, in tabloid, in comic strips or comic books, in radio we hear while driving, or maybe in the bathroom wall graffiti. Humor is inevitable and exists in all aspects of our life. All objects around us can be the topic of humor. We can laugh when we talk about sex, marriage life, politics condition, religion and belief, educational background, work dynamic, sports event. There is no object that cannot be ridiculed, joked about, and used or abused one way or another (2).

Wrench & McCroskey define humor as a communicative way to produce exhilaration and cheerfulness. It is created and distributed by some person (e.g. an employee) and developed by some group, with another person or group as a target, and is designated to be amusing to the target. In line with that, the target also perceives it a willful action (3). The characteristics of humor are: 1) it contains a message that may be far from evidence; 2) it often establishes a connection by spurious means that carry no legitimacy in rational discourse; 3) it is unclear how seriously the message is intended; and finally, 4) it is recognize as "something other than serious (4) . People with a high sense of humor are preferred in communication. A survey conducted by Hart, polled 4000 respondents, shows that people with the characteristic of humor maker such as cheerful, happy, good-natured, jolly, and can take a joke are more preferable (5).

Humor not only influences communication in real life, but the conversation in the virtual world also cannot be separated from it. Humor plays an important role in making the conversation lively and exciting through full-of-laughter messages. Humor is also presented and developed in online chat applications, such as WhatsApp and Blackberry Messenger. People use those applications not only to communicate seriously, but also to share a joke by, for example, making and sharing a funny statement, video and image. Joke makes the conversation in the chat groups fresher and fun.

In online world, humors and jokes have many benefits, including foster interpersonal relationships and attraction, strengthen solidarity and support, and increasing individual popularity. In addition, they are also developed in cyberspace because they can deliver and enhance the creativity of Internet users in creating cuteness, either verbally or nonverbally (6). The adoption and use of Internet, which precipitately and rapidly increased by dint of its capability in providing right (and quick) message to the right person at the right time, has become the positive factor for spreading humor. Humor is distributed widely as Internet works real-time and ties up every corner of the world.

Humor also exists in Internet-based conversation group in workplace, including in a group of college teachers or lecturers. Among any work type, academicians is one who have the highest access to

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digital media, because the Internet plays important role in transmitting education and updating knowledge (7). For example, in the United States, the average ownership of digital media among lecturers and teachers is higher than the national average (8).

One of the fastest accretion countries in term of quantity of Internet users in 2017 compared to five years earlier is Indonesia. With 51% growth from last year, this country is nearly 3 times over the global average of Internet user. Indonesia is the fourth country with the largest number of active Facebook users, after Brazil, India, and the United States (9). In Indonesia, there are no official figures on the ownership of digital media among lecturers, but a survey conducted to 872 respondents from 30 Indonesian State Universities (PTN) shows that the use of computer-based media among lecturers is very high. Digital media is one of their primary needs. They need it not only as a tool for communication, but a proposition to increase the capacity of their teaching (10). In such conditions, humor should be widespread through the Internet in Indonesia

As well as in real-world, gender relations also shape humor in virtual world. Many researches explain that males use the Internet especially for entertainment and leisure purposes. Aside from gaining information and knowledge, they accessed it for having fun. Meanwhile, females use it mainly for building relationship with others in interpersonal communication, and for educational assistance. Furthermore, in analyzing gender differences of Internet use, the researchers considered several things, such as age, education, and prior experiences (11). These researches confirm that humor in the Internet is shaped by gender differences.

This study investigated gender differences in workplace humor among lecturers on WhatsApp group(s), including the topics, the message forms, and the participants' feelings.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Importance of Humor

Workplace humor is a customary and effluent phenomenon. Humor is a social action that impacts human relationships, team bound, and organizational dynamics. Various researches have denoted that humor can influence relationships at work, both horizontally and vertically. Humor is vital. It has a substantial effect on the capability of an employee to build bonds with other employees. Beside management and technical skills, humor is important in the relation of manager and subordinate. Employees perceive managers and leaders—who can deliver humor well while communicating—as relationship-oriented individuals. They also perceive it significantly in regard to the affect and professional respect dimensions. Humor can be used as an effective tool in generating employee's imagination and creative power (3)

2.2. Comprehension-Elaboration Theory of Humor

Human response to a humor is different. If the humor is delighting or pleasuring the target, it produces happiness and cheerfulness, a positive effect. On the contrary, if the humor is not fun, it may not only be boring, but also will induce some negative effect. Therefore, delivering humor needs not only skills, but also some supporting factors and conditions. The comprehension- elaboration theory of humor evocation identifies some factors under which individual will feel a particular humor event funny and enjoyable. According to Wyer (2004), this theory posits that no matter how difficult to understand the humor is, by the cognitive elaboration the target subsequently determines the intensity or degree to which he/she will relish it. The ingratiator's hu-mor may initially begin to obtain amusement from the target, but they will then stipulate "post-comprehension cognitive activities". At this level, they may think more about the content or other aspects outside it. The target will be moved to think outside the content if he/she has any interest in such issues, such as (1) the basis of the individual who tell the joke, (2) whether the funny story is socially appropriate in a situation (e.g., the community/workplace), and/or (3) whether the story is abusive to him/herself or other people. For the time of elaboration process, the target's amusement may escalate if the story in particular is relevant and appropriate to the situation and condition. Otherwise, if the target's elaboration finds the source's humor hurtful, or if the target attributes an undesirable motive to the source (e.g., ingratiation), his or her immediate enjoyment of the humor will decrease (12).

In addition, although individuals may have differences in types of humor preferences, whether it's sarcastic, racist, sexual, etc. (Bill & Naus, 1992; Goodchilds, 1959; Henkin & Fish, 1986), there is no reason to expect that any of these types will consistently elicit a positive or negative reaction across targets. Appreciation for different types of humor depends on many factors, including attitudinal disposition, group membership, and situational norms (Cantor, 1976). The criterion most relevant to the current question is simply whether the target finds the humor enjoyable or not, regardless of the form it takes. Thus, the ability of humor to ingratiate will be based on the extent to which the target judges the humor to be enjoyable, and this will occur through the comprehension elaboration process (12).

2.3. Gender Differences in Using Internet

Different from males, females show preponderant agreement in adopting Internet for gaining knowledge or educational information, online chatting, performing a better live with the newest trend, and communicating more formal by e-mail. Meanwhile, Males show greater consumption of Internet for selling and–of course–buying goods, listening music or other online audio pro-gram, constructing and working on website management, probing and developing romance, searching for worldwide hard to find products, adhering sexual desires and relationships, watching pornography, and playing online games.

Most people assume that a sarcastic utterance is feasible for males, but unfortunately not for females. A male worker who states sarcastic sentence even may be considered smart and shrewd, while a female worker who states similar sentence is perceived as overbearing, dangerous, and abusive (13). Hemmasi in his research elaborates the results of researches about gender aspect as an important variable that influence the humor analysis in some condition. The researches were from Losco & Epstein (1975), Chapman & Gadfield (1976), Hassett & Houlihan (1979), and Brodzinsky, Barnet, & Aiello (198l). Those researches show that females perceive humorous situations less funny than males; comparing to females, males generally feel same jokes more enjoyable and amusing. Females and males also have a tendency to prefer different genres of humor. Some topic that "funny" for males, sometimes are not funny for females. Therefore, men seem to prefer an aggressive and sexual humor to other types of humor, while women seem to prefer the simple humor. Men find sexual jokes substantially funnier. They happy when listen to sexual humor with sexist content. On the contrary, they do not enjoy sexual humor if the content threats the existence of men. For females, sexist jokes, whether toward men or women, is inappropriate. Women infrequently make a humor, because telling a joke especially in front of men, is considered impolite or aggressive (14).

3. Methodology

To investigate gender differences in workplace humor among lecturers on WhatsApp groups, including the topics, the message forms, and the participants' feelings, phenomenology method was applied to this research. This method allows the researchers to understand the subject's language and their interpretation over the world. A study with phenomenological approach seeks the meaning of life experience of a number of people about a concept or phenomenon. Moreover, this paradigm requires researchers to enter the conceptual world of the subjects examined in such a way so that researchers understand what and how an understanding developed by those around events in everyday life (15). This means that re-search with phenomenological approach set in natural place and time. With all the characteristics of the phenomenological approach, it will get holistic data about informants' experience related to humor in conversation groups of the lecturers.

The subjects of this research were thirty academicians in West Java and Banten. They were lecturers of Universitas Padjadjaran, Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, and Universitas Singaperbangsa. Fifteen male and fifteen female lecturers was chosen purposively. They were lecturers who was not only the humor maker but also the object. The researchers used in-depth interview to collect data about informants experience related to their jokes. They also calculated the distribution of their answers in percentage.

4. Results and Findings

Before interviewing the informants about the topics, the message forms, and their feelings when they were the humor object, the researchers found that 83% of informants said that humor in their groups was dominated by male, 10% by female, 7% balanced. All male informants (100%) & 40% of female informants said that they frequently initiate a humor.

4.1. The Topics

For male lecturers, almost any topic can be humor object, but the most frequent are 1) prevalent jokes from online sources that often contain sexual content. The sexual humor conveyed by the male lecturers is very selective. If there are female lecturers in their WhatsApp group, male lecturers ascertained that the sexual humor is merely about the funny communication between men and women or husband and wife. However, in informal groups of all male lecturers, the sexual topic goes deeper but they still avoid pornography. They also strongly avoid mentioning vulgar words related to genital and sexual intercourse. If group members feel that sexual humor is already vulgar, there will be a member stopping the topic. They dismiss the sex-stubborn conversation by saying directly that the joke should not proceed, or by diverting the topic; 2) Academic & financial conditions of the university. Actually, they talk about the sortfalls of academic and financial conditions at their universities, but then they make it as an object that they laugh at together. For them, even worrisome conditions can be a laughing material as long as they feel and experience it together. Financial is perceived as the warmest topic to laugh at during the late payment of their wages or when they recieve smaller income; 3) The unique condition of their students, especially nonphysical aspect like the laziest or the sleepiest in class. Aside from that, male lecturers also 4) use their colleague's conditions as a topic to make fun of. Below are some parts of the lecturers themselves that becomes the topic of humor:

1) Unmarried Status of the Lecturers

There are 53% of male informants who state that they do not hesitate to clearly post a funny statement about their unmarried male group members, whether these unmarried lecturers are junior (under 40) or senior (over 40). However, the male lecturers do not dare to make fun of unmarried female group members. Even if they do, they only make a joke on unmarried female lecturers of under 25. This fact is aligned with the statement from Nia, one of informants, an unmarried female young lecturer: "My friend only dares to make a joke about my unmarried status, even though there are two others unmarried women in the group. It is that I'm still young and they know I will not be angry. Both of my male and female friends do not dare to make a joke about unmarried status of senior female lecturers, unless the seniors are the ones who start and open themselves to it." Meanwhile, senior female lecturers tend not to talk about marital status in the context of jokes, but in giving advice.

2) Physical conditions

Among males, the conditions to make fun of are black (dark) skin, fat body, hair condition (bald or hoar), and big belly. A male informant said: "My Friend took a candid photograph of my stomach and posted it to our WhatsApp group. Then, all of them sent laugh emoticon". For male lecturers, all physical conditions, as long as it is not physical disabilities may be-come the topic of humor. Meanwhile, women lecturer physical conditions that can be the topic is only their overweight. The members of the group only dare to make a joke about women physical condition, if the women herself laugh at it. "My skin is dark, but only Iwan (a male lecturer) who becomes the object of laughter. Nobody dares to make a joke about my skin color," said Maya, an informant.

3) Status as a junior in Workplace.

There were two categories of junior status: as an employee and as a member of WhatsApp group. Senior lecturers make an employee rank as a topic of humor. On the other side, the latest people joining the group may be made fun of by their friends who has already joined in.

4) Silly habits

Another topic for humor in WhatsApp group is silly habits, either in the real world or in virtual life. A good example of real-world silliness is sleeping during meetings. "Don't try to sleep during meetings. Or, you will find your photographs an object of laughter in the group," said Tedi. The example of silliness in virtual life is "typo" or misspelling, such as "makna (meaning)" becomes "makan (eat)". Another common error as the object of humor is sending messages to the wrong group (also called "salah kamar (wrong room)". One of the informant said that he became the object of the joke when he sent a message "My dear, please meet me at the station" to the lecturers group, when he should have sent it to his girlfriend.

5) Domestic Affairs

Domestic affairs or family matter turned out to be the object of jokes, especially for male lecturers. "Well, we can understand you being late to campus. You must help your wife first, washing cloth. Hahaha.." Mario gave the example of him being the object of laughter. For them, there are jobs that men are deemed unfit to do, such as hanging clothes, mopping floors, or feeding their babies.

For female lecturers, the topics of humor in WhatsApp group are lesser than of males: 1) Prevalent jokes from many online sources that never contain sexual content; 2) Academic condition of the university, but rarely about its financial condition. Female lecturers feel that it is unnecessary to speak or make fun of finance because in their household they receive another income from their husbands. They restrain to complaining about the financial condition to maintain their husband and family's dignity; 3) Their male colleagues' conditions, but they never initiate it and never talk about household affairs in funny ways. For female lecturers, household is a domestic task that is not

appropriate for being the topic of jokes. They actually consider a man who are willing to help the work of his wife the ideal, fully responsible family man.

4.2. The Way Humor Is Delivered

Humor experienced by the informants is in form of verbal and nonverbal communications. Verbally, it can be expressed explicitly or implicitly. Male lecturers prefer explicit messages like "C'mon Demian, get married this year or you will decompose." or "It's so dark. I thought the night has come, but it was just Dani." Meanwhile, the implied joke is like "People under head of lector (lecturer grade) are not allowed to join in, just stay in this room until you are old enough.. hahaha.."

Nonverbal humor forms include memes associated with the informant, YouTube funny videos, their own making videos, photos taken secretly (candid photographs), and edited photographs. In a group where the majority members are of the same tribe, beside delivered in Indonesian, humor is also delivered in their local language. The humor maker want everyone to understand and laugh, therefore, he/she will use the most easily understood and funniest words. Bahasa Indonesia is considered an elegant language. Because of that, sometimes local language is often chosen because it has more funny vocabularies.

4.3. Feelings and Reactions Againts the Humor

Not all of the lecturers felt foolished when they became the object of humor. They felt both positive and negative emotions. The positive is happiness and gladiolus. They arise because the informants felt that they are recognized, and exist in the conversation group. Being the object of jokes is better than ignored by the whole group. Janitra, an informant even mentioned, "Negative feedback is better than zero feedback". Positive emotions are also perceived when the conversation and interaction in the group become alive and bustling when the informants are being the object. Beside that, due to their reciprocal perceived happiness, members of the group become more solid in both the real world and the cyberspace. By making fun of each other, group members feel able to know the characters of their colleagues. They feel humor tightens the bond of the group.

Meanwhile, the perceived negative emotion is resentfulness. It arises when the humor is catapulted by those whose position is superior. In this case the humor maker holds higher office or more senior but he/she do not want to be made fun of. It is different if he/she makes a joke about his/her juniors but he/she can accept it when they make a corresponding joke about him/her. It is positive, because the joke may be reciprocal or bidirectional.

Other negative emotions arise when the humor relates to the members'family: their parents, husbands, wives, or children who read the joke may regard it as something serious, as expressed by Nirina: "One time, my little sister borrowed my cell phone. She read the incoming WhatsApp message. It was my friend joking about my unmarried status. Then she told our parents about it, and then my mother cried about it." After that, Nirina asked her friends to stop mocking her unmarried status in order to safeguard her family's feeling.

The followings are the differences of feelings between male and female lecturers:

1. 73% of females and 60% of males felt victimized.
2. 40% of males and 13% of females felt proud being the object of humor, because it increased their personal attractiveness and relation as well as their popularity.
3. Female lecturers could freely laugh at her male colleagues' weaknesses, while male lecturers had to be careful to laugh at them

Compared to male lecturers, female lecturers are more concerned with the individuals who make a joke. They also consider more whether their joke is appropriate with the social condition. They avoid abusive humor. They also tend to stop the humor if it leads to offensive conversation.

4.4. Discussion

The results of this study are aligned with the literature review that has noted humor as something normally created, shared, and used more by males. It is as Freud state that in our culture, people expect women as submissive, passive, unresisting, receptive, and unassertive. Men are considered active, dynamic, energetic, initiating, and assertive. People expect women not to laugh as loud as men. However, men feel happy when women laugh if they tell a good humor, but only if the laughter is not too loud. People consider a man with a good taste of humor is someone who is not only facetious in his remarks but also can tell funny stories. Women can only accept while men create and produce humor (14). To analyze humor, it needs not only to explore how men and women prefer jokes to listen to, which type that is more enjoyable for them, but the researchers also need to analyze the gender of the funny story teller or the joker. It also determines whether the audience find it funny or not.

Humor in WhatsApp group of lecturers, is an example of phenomena that depend on the situation. Group setting affects humor dynamics in it. The researchers found three types of lecturer WhatsApp group relating to humor:

1. Formal WhatsApp group. This group consists of all lecturers of one department or faculty, including the official one. The group mainly serves as a media for work coordination. In this group, humor do not develop well.
2. Nonformal WhatsApp group. This group is created for work coordination of a division. The members are only people involved in a committee. There are some probabilities for them to have humor in their conversation as long as the members are in the same range of age.
3. Informal WhatsApp group. This group has no correlation with work coordination. The member is very selective according to some criteria. Inviting someone to become a member needs approval from other members. But humor develop very well in this kind of group. The example of this group is "Zumba Gym", a group of lecturers in faculty of Nursing Science of Padjadjaran University which only consists of female lecturers who love having lunch together and doing Zumba.

The results also showed that humor is a confronting act. In a group that has hierarchical member composition, the lower level members are generally inferior to those of higher positions. The higher postions joke more than the lower ones. And even, it is normal for them to use humorous setting to point out and emphasize their status and power (14). This research interviews showed that young lecturers, even male lecturers, are likely to restrain themselves to start telling a joke. When they are involved in humorous situation, they tend to alleviate the threatening jokes by acting as if the content of the jokes are nonthreatening.

5. Conclusion

Based on the results and findings, the researchers can conclude that in WhatsApp group of lecturers, males initiate and dominate humor conversations. They has more joke topics than the females. They are considered "normal" and "allowed to" talk about sexual content. The number of males who perceive positively being the humor object is higher than the female. Female lecturers can freely laugh at her male colleagues' weaknesses, while male lecturers have to be careful to laugh back at them.

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