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The Effect of Misogynistic Humor on the Perception of Women

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THE EFFECT OF MISOGYNISTIC HUMOR

ON THE PERCEPTION OF WOMEN

by

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ABSTRACT

Humor is often a controversial genre of entertainment. It is not critically examined due to its intentionally offensive nature. This study examines the impact of sexist humor on the perception of women. Students (n = 1,096) from a 4 year university were divided into two groups and both participated in a questionnaire examining attitudes toward women and media viewing habits. One group was exposed to clips of sexist humor from television shows and the other was not. A series of analyses of variance (ANOVA) conducted on the two groups did not find significant differences between those who had viewed sexist clips and those who did not. However, linear regressions found media viewing habits and preferences were significant predictors for five out of eight factors of sexism: dependency/deference, purity, caretaking, benevolent sexism, and hostile sexism. The factors not found to be significant were modern sexism, stereotypical images/activities, and emotionality. Overall, the results indicate long-term exposure to sexist humor is correlated with higher levels of sexism. These findings support the need for more critical analysis of sexist humor.

Keywords: sexist humor, sexism, humor, women in media

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The media consumed by a person leaves an undeniable impact on their development and perception of the world. One of the most endearing and influential genres in the media is comedy. Not only does it provide entertainment and satire about current sociocultural issues, it is also the genre most defined by its content. Whether a topic is acceptable to joke about remains a controversial and highly subjective matter. One of these debated topics is humor used at the expense of women. Sexist humor is present in film, television, music, and even advertising. The influence this humor has on the social atmosphere is palpable, particularly since exposure to the media is beginning at a younger age nowadays. With an increasingly feminist atmosphere, not only has the critical examination of media also increased, but it has become vital to do so. This study seeks to examine the relationship between sexist humor and the perception of women, including the reinforcement of gender norms, heteronormative views, and traditional femininity. It is hypothesized that men and women exposed to sexist humor will hold more sexist attitudes. For this study, sexist humor is defined as any comedy that mentally degrades women's capabilities, physically objectifies women, or belittles relationships between women, particularly when perpetuated by men.

Women in Media

An unfortunate reality of nearly all media is that it contains misogynistic content. From television advertising depicting women in more traditional roles to print advertisements rampant with physical objectification, it is hard to get away from the ideal image of a woman who is skinny, pretty, and submissive (Dworkin et al., 1998; Rosewarne, 2008; Yoder, Christopher, & Holmes, 2008). Another study examining films found women were more often relegated to

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secondary roles, where they reinforced heteronormative stereotypes, such as having children or being defined only by their marriage (Escholz, Bufkin & Long 2002). This is significant to note since women are rarely given the chance to tell their own stories, often having to revolve around leading male characters.

Thruer (2007) noted a trend where women depicted in media, and especially television, may seem feminist at first. However, further analysis shows that women are not only always attractive and sexualized, but also display more forms of indirect aggression, such as gossiping or shunning. Male characters are rarely shown displaying this kind of behavior; it has become coded for a feminine trait. This corroborates the analysis of teen-aimed magazines made by Keller (2011), who argues that simply referring to one's content as "feminist" does not make it so. Individual empowerment is not equal to challenging inequality in a larger society, nor does the claiming of a feminist identity equal the political commitment of the feminism movement. Research by Attwood (2009) notes that women are criticized consistently in media for either being too sexual or not sexual enough. It is important to also add that this criticism in American culture frequently leaves out women's opinions in discussions on female characters, giving male writers and reviewers a wider platform than females.

This trend also held up for video games in a study by Dill and Thill (2007), which found that female characters tended to be more sexualized and dressed in skimpier clothes when compared to their male counterparts. The same study then asked students what the ideal video game character's defining trait would be. The most popular answer for male characters was "powerful," and for females, it was "provocative." This phenomenon is called eroticized aggression, in which female characters are shown as both sexy and violent, an image that is

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established as a positive trait and may lead to increased violence against women. Another study revealed that only a surprising 15% of video games aimed at children had leading female characters, while 30% had no female characters at all, and another 21% only depicted them in "damsel in distress" roles (Dietz, 1998).

Slevec & Tiggemann (2011) have introduced media-processing variables meant to explain how media influences a viewer, which also can be applied to sexist portrayals of women. These four variables are internalization of thinness and beauty ideals, social comparison of physical features, appearance investment regarding the significance of beauty in general, and aging anxiety of physical differences from getting older. The more media one consumes, which largely tends to be sexist, the more these variables are increased. In addition, the four variables are associated with body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, and anxiety. This is very important to note as it signifies that equality cannot just be reached through political and economic measures, but also through social and cultural change.

Not only in fiction, but female politicians in media coverage are portrayed in stereotypical ways, most often as the "competent, but cold" trope which paints them as unlikeable compared to male politicians, indicating that sexism is pervasive in forms of news as well (Bligh, Schlehofer, Casad, & Gaffney, 2012). Media consumption has also increased due to the availability of technology, particularly the unregulated and uncensored viewing of TV programs on the internet. The percentage of having at least one internet device in student's rooms has increased from 15.7% in 1999 to 96.4% in 2008 (Borlase, Gander, & Gibson, 2013).

Effects of Positive Portrayals

There is evidence suggesting exposure to female-positive media has an effect on eradicating misogyny. Research by Halliwell (2013) demonstrated that women who viewed positive body image advertisements versus advertisements with very thin models, were more likely to show appreciation for their body and less likely to internalize a thin body image ideal. The same research further shows that women who already had high body appreciation were less affected by thin models. This shows that positive body image has a protective effect against environmental influences such as objectification. Women who viewed healthy models were also less likely to show anxiety and body dissatisfaction (Owen & Spencer, 2013). Women who are at a higher risk for eating disorders also tend to diet less after viewing images of healthy models (Fister & Smith, 2004).This leads to a cycle where the more media consumed depicting healthy women leads to higher self-esteem, which seems to have a protective effect when viewing unhealthy depictions.

Furthermore, listening to songs with pro-equality messages decreased sexist views and behaviors toward women (Greitemeyer, Hollingdale, & Traut-Mattausch, 2012). Women who consume media depicting women in non-stereotypical roles tend to have higher self-perception, more leadership aspirations, and more progressive views about gender roles (Simon & Hoyt, 2007). This applies to television commercials as well. Women with higher self-esteem who viewed commercials showing women in non-traditional roles reported they would like less traditionally feminine roles in the future, such as homemaking or having children. This stands in stark contrast with women who had low self-esteem and gravitated toward traditional roles. It is

important to have more positive portrayals of women in media due to its reverse effect on sexist portrayals and encouragement of non-stereotypical activities.

Effects of Sexist Portrayals

Exposure to sexist content has consistently been shown to increase sexist attitudes in both men and women. Media consumption is correlated with increased sexist views and reinforcement of gender roles. For example, the more sexist views one possesses, the more they tend to objectify women and believe they should use cosmetics to be more attractive (Swami, Coles, Wilson, & Salem 2010). Exposure to media that objectified women also resulted in higher feelings of anxiety, anger, and body dissatisfaction (Krawczyk, 2014). Interestingly, even viewing images that are considered sexually "empowering," that is, showing women in agentic sexual roles rather than passive ones, were found to increase body dissatisfaction and self-objectification in women (Halliwell, Malson, & Tischner, 2011). This is directly related to the connection between sexualization of girls from a young age contributing to increased aggression in perpetrators of violence and the increase in females who are the victims of it (Purcell & Zurbriggen, 2013).

Research by Peter and Valkenburg (2007) has found that adolescents who view more sexually explicit content on the internet were more likely to regard women as sexual objects, particularly boys who began exposure at a younger age. A study by Stermer and Burkley (2013) demonstrated that exposure to sexist video games was likely to increase levels of hostile and benevolent sexism in men.

This is also true of television, as demonstrated by a study indicating that television viewing was related to more sexist views regarding the role of women in society (Signorielli 1989). Increased viewing also leads to more disordered eating and body dissatisfaction (Slevec & Tiggemann, 2011). The effect carries on to television advertising, as made apparent by a study finding women and men who viewed ads depicting women as sex objects were more likely to show higher levels of dissatisfaction with their body (Lavine, Sweeney & Wagner, 1999).

<div align="center">Sexist Humor</div>

One of the more dangerous aspects of humor is that it is not analyzed as seriously as other genres. Derogatory expressions present in comedy are not examined critically, and so misogynistic humor is generally one of the most "acceptable" forms of sexism (Ford & Gray, 2013). It is considered humorous and commonplace, creating a social context in which it is okay to laugh. This context normalizes and even encourages sexist attitudes, as the Prejudiced Norm Theory states (Ford & Ferguson, 2004). Similarly, people who preferred sexist humor to non-sexist humor were found to have higher measures of sexism, particularly hostile sexism (Eyssel & Bohner, 2007; Moore, Griffiths & Payne, 1987; Thomas & Esses 2004).

As a matter of fact, for sexist men, the exposure to sexist humor can actually promote discrimination and prejudice against women due to the social norm that has been created (Ford, Boxer, Armstrong, & Edel, 2008; Ford, Wentzel, & Lorion, 2001). Men also tend to be less critical of visual media they consume, according to media literacy scales (Lambiase, Reichert, Adkins, & LaTou, 2012). Exposure to sexist humor for women led to increased disgust, loss of self-esteem, and non-verbal reactions indicating embarrassment and contempt (LaFrance & Woodzicka, 1998). This may be explained by a study by Love and Deckers (1989) that suggested

women found sexist humor less funny because they identified with the victim, having previously been discriminated against on the basis of their gender. Women will identify with the female characters they view; therefore, when the character who is a stand-in for women is abused or mocked, it becomes personal for women in the audience.

The effects of sexist humor reach even further, however. A study done by Ford (2000) showed that sexism in comedy was deemed appropriate and it led to an increased tolerance of sexist events. The more humorous a person found a situation to be, the less likely they were to call it sexist and more likely to approve of it (Bill & Naus, 1992). Humor is essentially used to mask the severity of misogyny. Several studies show that exposure to sexist jokes increased levels of rape proclivity among men (Romero-Sánchez, Durán, Carretero-Dios, Megías, & Moya, 2010; Thomae & Viki, 2013). Enjoyment of sexist humor was also linked with increased physical and sexual aggression in men and increased acceptance of interpersonal violence in women (Ryan & Kanjorksi, 1998).

<div align="center">Theoretical Perspective and Current Study</div>

This study drew from the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1971). The theory posits that the primary way children learn behaviors, emotional reactions, and attitudes is through observation and modelling of others. The Social Learning Theory has been applied to the understanding of aggression, behavior modification in psychological disorders, and increasing self-efficacy (Bandura, 1969; Bandura, 1978; Bandura, 1993). Thus, the theory explains how frequently viewing sexism and negative attitudes toward women in media leads to a direct increase in that behavior.

The Prejudiced Norm Theory builds off Bandura's theory to explain how misogynist humor creates a social norm that makes it acceptable to laugh at sexism (Ford & Ferguson, 2004). The theory proposes that a lack of negative reaction or a positive reaction such as canned/studio laughter following a sexist joke allows the viewer to believe this is an appropriate reaction, and this normalizes degrading and objectifying attitudes toward a target group. This study examined the effect viewing sexist humor in television had on one's perception of women, including ideas of heteronormativity, hostile and benevolent sexism, femininity, and paternalism. It was theorized that exposure to sexist humor would lead to higher levels of sexism.

CHAPTER TWO: METHOD

Participants and Procedure

Data for the proposed study was collected from the University of Central Florida via the

Sona System and has received approval from the IRB (see Appendix A). A total of 1,096

students participated. The majority of students were female ($n = 811$, 75%). Participants were

mostly White ($n = 634$, 57.8%) or Hispanic ($n = 185$, 16.9%). The age of students ranged from

18 to 62 ($M = 20.38$; $SD = 4.64$). Participants were divided into two different groups using the

Sona System based on their interest in participating in two different studies. The experimental

group consisting of 561 students was exposed to clips of sexist humor prior to completing the

online questionnaire. The control group of 535 students completed the same online questionnaire

without being exposed to clips of sexist humor. Each online study took about 35 minutes to

complete.

Measures

Exposure to Short-Term Sexist Humor

Participants in the experimental group were primed with three clips of sexist humor prior

to completing the online questionnaire to examine the effects of exposure to short-term sexist

humor. All three were from popular television shows, *The Big Bang Theory*, *How I Met Your

Mother,* and *Family Guy*. Sexist humor in the clips is defined as mentally degrading (e.g.,

women only vote for an attractive presidential candidate, women can't learn science), physically

objectifying (e.g., women's body useful as commodities or for sex, counting past sexual partners,

men pitting women against each other in appearance), or belittling women's relationships (e.g.,

displaying indirect aggression by subtly insulting each other or referring to each other with gendered slurs).

Modern Sexism Scale

Participants in both groups were asked eleven questions about their views on women in the modern era, specifically about refusal to admit discrimination against women, antagonism toward women's movements toward equality, and resentment about certain special favors such as affirmative action (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995). Examples of questions include "Women will make more progress by being patient and not pushing too hard for change," "Universities are wrong to admit women in costly programs such as medicine, when in fact a large number will leave their jobs after a few years to raise their children," and "In order not to appear sexist, many men are inclined to overcompensate women." Participants are being asked to respond to questions on a scale of 1 (*strongly agree*) to 6 (*strongly disagree*). Scores ranged from 11 to 66 with lower scores indicating more sexist attitudes. The alpha reliability was measured as .75 in the original study (Swim at el., 1995) and .82 two years later (Swim & Cohen, 1997). Reliability for the current study was .62. The complete list of questions can be found in Appendix B.

Femininity Ideology Scale

Participants in both groups were asked 45 questions that assess their expectations of how women should act (Levant, Richmond, Cook, House, & Aupont, 2007). This is being measured by five categories: stereotypic images and activities, dependency/deference, purity, caretaking, and emotionality. Examples of questions include "A woman should not swear," "Women should act helpless to attract a man," and "A woman should be responsible for teaching family values to her children." The answers are given from a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*).

Overall, higher scores indicated more stereotypical views. The Cronbach's alpha reliability was .93 in the original study (Levant et al., 2007). Questions were grouped into five subscales: stereotypic images and activities (11 questions) (a=.86), dependency/deference (10 questions) (a=.87), purity (9 questions) (a=.77), caretaking (7 questions) (a=.81), and emotionality (8 questions) (a=.87). For all forty-five questions, alpha reliability was .93 in the current study. The complete list of questions can be found in Appendix C.

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory

Both groups of participants were asked 22 questions that measure hostile sexism, which is actively antagonistic toward women, and benevolent sexism, which relegates women to traditionally feminine roles such as more caring or compassionate while dismissing their other features (Glick & Fiske, 1996). This is measured with three main categories: protective paternalism, complementary gender differentiation, and heterosexuality intimacy. Examples of questions include "No matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he has the love of a woman," "Women seek to gain power by getting control over men," and "Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility." Answers are given on a scale of 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 6 (*agree strongly*), with six of the items being reversed scored. Higher scores indicated more sexist views. The Cronbach's alpha reliability was .83 in the original study (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Questions were divided into two subscales: hostile sexism (11 questions) (a=.86) and benevolent sexism (11 questions) (a=.82). For all twenty-two questions, alpha reliability was .82 in the current study. The complete list of questions can be found in Appendix D.

Demographic Questionnaire

Participants were asked five questions regarding their age, race, gender, year in college, and grade point average.

Media Viewing Questionnaire

Participants in both groups were asked twelve questions about their media viewing habits, specifically about the shows they watch and their preference for them. Six of the questions were asked on the basis of how often a show is watched from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*frequently*). Six questions were asked on how much the program is liked from 1 (*extremely disliked*) to 5 (*extremely liked*). These questions were used in determining effects of long-term exposure to sexist humor. The programs in alphabetical order are: *The Big Bang Theory, Community, Family Guy, How I Met Your Mother, Parks and Recreation,* and *The Simpsons.* Of these shows, three often include humorous sexist portrayals of women according to the criteria described above (*The Big Bang Theory, Family Guy, How I Met Your Mother*), and three have received praise for their diversity and equality in gender and have less instances of sexist humor (*Community, Parks and Recreation, The Simpsons*).

CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS

Preliminary analyses were conducted to assess the reliability of scales, distributional characteristics, intercorrelations of measures, and the extent of missing data. Missing data for the current study was minimal ($< 5\%$), therefore a simple mean substitution method was used (Kline, 2005). This method involves replacing the missing data with the overall mean value for the variable. There is the possibility that replacing missing data in this manner can distort the distribution of the data. However, it had no detectable effect on this dataset. This method of handling missing data is preferable to deletion methods as it allows for complete case analyses, does not reduce the statistical power of tests, and takes into consideration the reason for missing data (Twala, 2009). Moreover, this method of data imputation is a good representation of the original data as long as the missing data is less than 20%, which was the case in this study (Downey & King, 1998).

Analyses relevant to the study aims are described in the following sections. These include (a) intercorrelations of study variables, (b) a series of analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine if there is a difference is sexist attitudes based on exposure to sexist humor on television, and (c) linear regression analyses to determine how media viewing habits relate to level of sexism.

Intercorrelations of Study Variables

Correlations were conducted to determine if there were significant relationships between the variables examined, including demographics (i.e., age, gender, race), and year in college on TV viewing and preference habits. All four factors in TV viewing and preference were

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significantly correlated with each other. A significant positive correlation occurred between age and equality TV preference. There was a significant negative correlation between gender and sexist TV viewing, equality TV viewing, and equality TV preference. A significant positive correlation was also found between year in college and equality TV viewing. Results of correlation analysis among TV viewing/preference habits and demographic variables can be found in Table 1.

TV show viewing habits and preferences were studied with measures of sexism. Sexist TV viewing habits were significantly correlated to lower levels of Purity but higher levels of Hostile Sexism. Equality TV viewing habits were significantly correlated to lower levels of Purity, Caretaking, and Benevolent Sexism. Preference for sexist TV was significantly correlated to lower levels of Dependency/Deference and Purity. Preference for equality TV was significantly correlated to lower levels of Purity but higher levels of Hostile Sexism. Results of correlation analysis among TV viewing/preference habits and measures of sexism can be found in Table 2.

Sexist Humor and Sexism

Data were analyzed using a series of analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine if exposure to sexist humor impacts participants' level of sexism. No significant differences between those participants who viewed sexist humor on television and those who did not view the video clips were found on any of the dependent measures. These measures included modern sexism, $F(1, 1094) = .06$, $p = .81$, stereotypical images/activities, $F(1, 1094) = 1.48$, $p = .22$, dependency/deference, $F(1, 1094) = .71$, $p = .40$, purity, $F(1, 1094) = .15$, $p = .70$, caretaking, $F(1, 1094) = 1.28$, $p = .26$, emotionality, $F(1, 1094) = .29$, $p = .59$, benevolent sexism, $F(1, 1094)$

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= .79, p = .38, and hostile sexism F (1, 1094) = .87, p = .35. Descriptive statistics for exposure to sexist humor and measures on the dependent measures can be found in Table 3.

Media Viewing Habits

Linear regressions were conducted to determine how media viewing habits relate to level of sexism. Preference and regular watching of sexist or equality-promoting TV shows were used to predict levels of sexism. The model was found to be significant for dependency/deference, F (4, 1091) = 6.37, p = .00, R^2 = .02, purity, F (4, 1091) = 18.74, p = .00, R^2 = .06, caretaking, F (4, 1091) = 2.88, p = .02, R^2 = .01, benevolent sexism, F (4, 1091) = 7.97, p = .00, R^2 = .03, and hostile sexism, F (4, 1091) = 4.31. p = .00, R^2 = .02. Results of the regression analysis can be found in Table 4. No significant findings were found for modern sexism, F (4, 1091) = .55, p = .70, R^2 = .00, stereotypic images and activities, F (4, 1091) = 2.29, p = .06, R^2 = .01, and emotionality, F (4, 1091) = .61, p = .70, R^2 = .00. Results of the regression analysis can be found in Table 5.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

This aim of this study was to examine the relationship between sexist humor and the perception of women, including the reinforcement of gender norms, heteronormative views, and traditional femininity. The hypothesis was that men and women exposed to sexist humor would display more sexist attitudes. The importance of this study is emphasized by the fact that humor is a genre that is frequently difficult to critically examine due to its controversial nature and subjective preferences.

Video Clip Analysis

The video clips used were from three shows that were also used for the sexist TV show preference section of the study: *The Big Bang Theory, Family Guy*, and *How I Met Your Mother*. Each show contributed three scenes. The specific instances shown in the clips were intended to demonstrate the kind of sexism commonly pervading the shows.

For *The Big Bang Theory*, the first clip shows the use of women as sex objects, particularly pitting women against each other in terms of physical attractiveness. As several studies indicate, the objectification of women leads to increased sexist views among men and body dissatisfaction among women (Lavine, Sweeney & Wagner, 1999; Krawczyk, 2014). The second clip has three main characters discussing one woman's sexual history, including using derogatory terms such as "slut." As Halliwell, Malson, and Tischner (2001) demonstrated, the consistent depiction of women in sexual contexts increases self-objectification and body dissatisfaction among women. The final clip from early in the show depicts the only female character as incapable of understanding concepts of physics and referring to herself as "stupid"

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for her failure. Along with the notable discouragement of women in scientific fields, relegating women to non-intellectual roles is a common trope that perpetuates the image of women in traditionally feminine roles and results in lower self-esteem (Simon & Hoyt, 2007).

In the clips for *Family Guy*, the first showed a parody of the women's suffrage movement in which their leader encourages them to vote for a particular candidate due to his attractiveness. The appreciation of sexist humor is often contingent on the stereotypical "ditzy" depictions of women (Moore, Griffiths & Payne, 1987). The second clip shows a conversation between two women consisting entirely of subtle insults disguised as admiration and underhanded compliments. As Thruer (2007) points out, women are more likely in television to display indirect aggression in the form of gossiping and other spiteful behaviors that are rarely shown for male characters. The third clip is of a woman having an overreaction to a simple statement made by a man, immediately sobbing, and throwing herself out of a window. The depiction of women as typically overemotional and irrational intentionally frames her as the antagonist as further perpetuates harmful stereotypes of women's emotionality.

The third show was *How I Met Your Mother*. In the first clip, a man makes a series of lewd and sexual comments about his friend's younger sister. The hypersexualization of girls and women in media has a noted effect on the increased sexism and aggression aimed at them in society (Purcell & Zurbriggen, 2013). This effect may be exacerbated by the fact that the age of the younger sister is never clarified, leaving it up to the viewer to fill in any inappropriate age. In the second clip, one of the main characters describes his preference for "bimbos" in which women are depicted as unintelligent and vapid beings defined only by their sexual interest in him. The secondary role women are often relegated to in which they are defined solely by their

heterosexual attraction to a primary male character has a long history in media. The consistent sexualization of women lowers their self-esteem and increases body dissatisfaction (Escholz, Bufkin & Long, 2002; Halliwell, Malson, & Tischner, 2011). The final clip describes the "Bro Code" in which a male character details his book, sharing tips on how to woo women through deception, encouraging violence, and often referring to women with gendered slurs such as "hoes." Along with more sexual depictions, it is also important to note that the socialization of sex and violence in women, referred to as "eroticized aggression," has troubling implications in the increased exploitation of women, particularly in pornography (Dill & Thill 2007).

<p style="text-align:center;">Exposure to Sexist Humor</p>

The results of this study found that sexist views as measured by the control and experimental groups did not significantly differ much between those who had been exposed to clips of sexist humor and those who had not. This indicates immediate exposure to sexist humor did not make a difference in sexist views. This is consistent with previous research indicating that until a social context is established and the humor in the clips is not approved by one's peers, it may not be accepted (Ford & Gray, 2013). In other words, watching isolated clips of TV shows to which one does not have previous exposure or peer approval is more likely to be subject to critical examination. Short-term exposure to sexist humor may not affect one's views.

Participants who reported long-term exposure and preference to sexist TV shows in the media viewing habits questionnaire did tend to have slightly higher levels of sexism, particularly in dependency/deference, purity, caretaking, benevolent sexism, and hostile sexism. These results seem to suggest that exposure to sexist media must be continuous as opposed to brief clips and must be preferred in order to have an effect on personal beliefs. This supports the

Prejudiced Norm Theory (Ford & Ferguson, 2004), which states that the creation of a culture that normalizes disparaging humor toward a certain group and reinforces it is a process that takes time. Tolerating and enjoying sexist humor, therefore, is learned over time and cannot be appropriately measured by immediate exposure to brief clips. A much better indication of media portrayals impacting sexist views comes from long-term exposure, in which one has peer approval. This will eventually result in the creation of a social context that accepts and even actively promotes sexism.

Positive correlations found between preference for equality-promoting TV shows with age and year in college suggests lower levels of sexism with age, indicating that sexist humor aimed at younger audiences may be responsible. This would corroborate the research by Peter and Valkenburg (2007) who noted that younger audiences viewing sexually objectifying content on the internet hold more sexist views with exposure to sexism. It is also important to note that exposure to media now begins at a younger age through the use of widely available technology, particularly for teenagers. This may contribute to older participants, who tend to rely less on technology and therefore have less exposure to sexist humor, hold less sexist views.

<u>Limitations of Research</u>

This study had certain weaknesses, which may affect the internal and external validity of the data. The study only used a sample size of students from a four-year university, with the majority within an 18 to 22 year old age width. Most of the participants were female and White or Hispanic, which means it cannot be generalized to all populations. For exposure to sexist humor, there is only a correlation and not a causation, which leaves some of the results of the study unambiguous. The videos and questionnaire were both online, leaving no way to ensure

that the videos were actually watched and that all the questions were properly understood or read before being answered.

As discussed above, the instances of sexist humor were chosen for their negative and harmfully stereotypical portrayals of women as described by previous research. However, humor is also a highly subjective field and it is possible that the interpretations of certain scenes may have occurred in a positive light for individuals. For example, in *The Big Bang Theory*, women being overtly sexualized and discussing their sexual history may have been viewed as positive due to the agentic and sexually liberating nature of the characters. In *Family Guy*, the seemingly spiteful conversation between women may have been interpreted as a close friendship in which insults are not taken seriously and are used to add levity in conversations.

The video clips may also have been interpreted critically before the questionnaire was answered, and this may negate the effect of its sexist humor. According to Ford & Gray (2013), social context plays a major role in the acceptance and enjoyment of sexist humor. If a participant does not know how one's peers will react to the video clips, they may be less likely to find it humorous and therefore less likely to let it affect their views. Therefore, another case where the clips may have an opposite effect is if the peer group of a participant has expressed disapproval of the shows the clips were taken from. In this scenario, the participant will view the clips with a more critical and negative mindset.

Another shortcoming of the research was the time period in which the scales used were developed. They were all created to analyze views in the 1990s, not in the 2010s. Due to the strides made in equality and sociocultural views within the years, this may lead to the scales

being outdated. The social context of both sexist humor and the perception of women has changed. The reliability and validity of the Modern Sexism Scale was also not high enough to be considered consistent. Furthermore, many of the result analyses were not found to be statistically significant, leading to no conclusion being drawn about their meaning.

Future Research

Several questions have been raised in regards to sexism, particularly in the comedy genre, from this research. Future research should examine the differences between long-term and short-term exposure to sexist humor in a controlled setting. The TV shows that were chosen for each category, promoting either equality or sexism, may have affected the opinion of participants. For example, if a participant liked the show the clips were from, it would lead to a more positive association which may lead them to downplay examples of sexism present in them. Another direction future research can take is to study whether the presence of canned/studio laughter in media leads to the humor being accepted and normalized, therefore contributing to the tolerance of sexist events. This has been proposed in the past but not studied (Ford 2000). The study should also be conducted with a more diverse sample size.

APPENDIX A: APPROVAL OF EXEMPT HUMAN RESEARCH

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: **Chrysalis L. Wright** and Co-PI: **Natasha Vashist**

Date: **April 22, 2014**

Dear Researcher:

On 4/22/2014, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination
Project Title:	Humor on television and viewer attitudes
Investigator:	Chrysalis L Wright
IRB Number:	SBE-14-10262
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 04/22/2014 03:50:12 PM EDT

IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX B: MODERN SEXISM SCALE

Please rate how you agree with each of the following statements using the following scale:
a = disagree strongly
b = disagree somewhat
c = disagree slightly
d = agree slightly
e = agree somewhat
f = agree strongly.

1. Discrimination against women in the labor force is no longer a problem in the United States.
2. I consider the present employment system to be unfair to women.
3. Women shouldn't push themselves where they are not wanted.
4. Women will make more progress by being patient and not pushing too hard for change.
5. It is difficult to work for a female boss.
6. Women's requests in terms of equality between the sexes are simply exaggerated.
7. Over the past few years, women have gotten more from the government than they deserve.
8. Universities are wrong to admit women in costly programs such as medicine, when in fact a large number will leave their jobs after a few years to raise their children.
9. In order not to appear sexist, many men are inclined to overcompensate women.
10. Due to social pressures, firms frequently have to hire under qualified women.
11. In a fair employment system, men and women would be considered equal.

APPENDIX C: FEMININITY IDEOLOGY SCALE

Factor 1: Stereotypic Images and Activities

 29. Women should have large breasts.

 23. A woman should have a petite body.

 28. Women should have soft voices.

 19. A woman should wear attractive clothing, shoes, lingerie and bathing suits, even if not comfortable.

 43. It is unlikely that a pregnant woman would be attractive.

 31. A girl should be taught how to catch a husband.

 20. It is expected that a woman who expresses irritation or anger must be going through P.M.S.

 45. Girls should not enjoy "tomboy" activities.

 1. It is more appropriate for a female to be a teacher than a principal.

 41. A woman should not be expected to do mechanical things.

 27. A woman should not show anger.

Factor 2: Dependency/Deference

 10. Woman should not want to succeed in the business world because men will not want to marry them.

 11. A woman should not expect to be sexually satisfied by her partner.

 4. A woman should not make more money than her partner.

 9. A woman's worth should be measured by the success of her partner.

 16. A woman should not consider her career as important as a man's.

 13. A woman should not be competitive.

 6. Women should have men make decisions for them.

 18. Women should act helpless to attract a man.

 3. A woman should not marry a younger man.

 8. A woman should not initiate sex.

Factor 3: Purity

 25. Women should not read pornographic material.

 15. A woman should remain a virgin until she is married.

 26. It is not acceptable for a woman to masturbate.

 30. A woman should not tell dirty jokes.

 12. A woman should not swear.

 32. A woman should not have a baby until she is married.

 22. A woman should be dependent on religion and spirituality for guidance.

 35. Women should dress conservatively so they do not appear loose.

 5. If a woman chooses to have an abortion, she should not feel guilty.

Factor 4: Caretaking

 7. An appropriate female occupation is nursing.

 2. When someone's feelings are hurt, a woman should try to make them feel better.

 14. A woman should know how people are feeling.

 21. Women should be gentle.

 17. A woman's natural role should be the caregiver of the family.

 38. A woman should be responsible for teaching family values to her family.

 24. A woman should be responsible for making and organizing family plans.

Factor 5: Emotionality

39. It is expected that a woman will be viewed as overly emotional.
36. It is expected that women will have a hard time handling stress without getting emotional.
37. It is expected that women in leadership roles will not be taken seriously.
40. It is expected that a single woman is less fulfilled than a married man.
42. It is expected that a woman will engage in domestic hobbies such as sewing and decorating.
44. It is likely that a woman who gives up custody of her children will not be respected.
34. It is expected that women will discuss their feelings with one another.
33. It is expected that women will not think logically.

APPENDIX D: AMBIVALENT SEXISM INVENTORY

Factor 1: Hostile Sexism

2. Many women are actually seeking special favors, such as hiring policies that favor them over men, under the guise of asking for "equality."

4. Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist.

5. Women are too easily offended.

7. Feminists are not seeking for women to have more power than men.

10. Most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for them.

11. Women seek to gain power by getting control over men.

14. Women exaggerate problems they have at work.

15. Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash.

16. When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against.

18. There are actually very few women who get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances.

21. Feminists are making entirely reasonable demands of men.

Factor 2: Benevolent Sexism

1. No matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he has the love of a woman.

3. In a disaster, women ought not necessarily to be rescued before men.

6. People are often truly happy in life without being romantically involved with a member of the other sex.

8. Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess.

9. Women should be cherished and protected by men.

12. Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores.

13. Men are complete without women.

17. A good woman should be set on a pedestal by her man.

19. Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility.

20. Men should be willing to sacrifice their own well-being in order to provide financially for the women in their lives.

22. Women, as compared to men, tend to have a more refined sense of culture and good taste.

APPENDIX E: TABLES

Table 1: Intercorrelations of TV Viewing/Preference and Demographic Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Sexist TV Viewing		.27*	.54*	.21	-.03	-.02	-.06**	.02	.01
2. Equality TV Viewing	.27*		.27*	.43*	.04	.00	-.20*	.09*	-.04
3. Sexist TV Preference	.54*	.27*		.21*	-.04	.00	-.05	-.03	.02
4. Equality TV Preference	.21*	.43*	.21*		0.6**	.01	-.26*	.06	-.04
5. Age	-.03	.04	-.04	.06**		-.08*	.01	.52*	-.13*
6. Race	-.02	.00	.00	.01	-.08*		-.02	-.06	-.05
7. Gender	-.06**	-.20*	-.05	-.26*	.01	-.02		.04	-.03
8. Year in College	.02	.09*	-.03	.05	.52*	-.06	.04		-.24*
9. GPA	.01	-.04	.02	-.04	-.13*	-.05	-.03	-.24*	

*p < .01, **p < .05

Table 2: Intercorrelations of TV Viewing/Preference and Measures of Sexism

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Modern Sexism		.57*	.49*	.34*	.42*	.29*
2. Stereotype	.57*		.70*	.51*	.60*	.50*
3. Dependency/Deference	.49*	.70*		.43*	.36*	.28*
4. Purity	.34*	.51*	.43*		.56*	.33*
5. Caretaking	.42*	.60*	.36*	.57*		.42*
6. Emotionality	.29*	.50*	.28*	.33*	.42*	
7. Benevolent Sexism	.28*	.38*	.22*	.46*	.51*	.27*
8. Hostile Sexism	.56*	.57*	.32*	.33*	.50*	.38*
9. Sexist TV Viewing	.02	-.00	-.04	-.18**	-.04*	-.04
10. Equality TV Viewing	.04	.04	.02	-.16**	-.09*	-.01
11. Sexist TV Preference	.01	-.06	-.13*	-.20*	.00	-.04
12. Equality TV Preference	.04	.05	-.05	-.16*	-.02	.00

*p < .01, **p < .05

Table 3: Intercorrelations of TV Viewing/Preference and Measures of Sexism Cont

	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Modern Sexism	.28*	.56*	.02	.04	.01	.040
2. Stereotype	.38*	.57*	-.00	.04	-.06	.05
3. Dependency/Deference	.22*	.32*	-.04	.02	-.13*	-.05
4. Purity	.46*	.33*	-.18*	-.16*	-.20*	-.16*
5. Caretaking	.51*	.50*	-.04	-.09*	.00	-.02
6. Emotionality	.27*	.38*	-.04	-.01	-.04	.00
7. Benevolent Sexism		.47*	-.05	-.15*	.01	-.04
8. Hostile Sexism	.47*		.07**	-.05	.05	.06**
9. Sexist TV Viewing	-.05	.07**		.27*	.54*	.21*
10. Equality TV Viewing	-.15*	-.05	.27*		.27*	.43*
11. Sexist TV Preference	.01	.05	.54*	.27*		.21*
12. Equality TV Preference	-.04	.06**	.21*	.43*	.21*	

*$p < .01$, **$p < .05$

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Levels of Sexism based on Exposure to Sexist Humor

Measure	Control		Experimental	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Modern Sexism	29.12	6.42	29.03	6.22
Stereotypical Images/Activities	20.80	8.95	20.16	8.45
Dependency/Deference	14.14	6.22	14.46	6.49
Purity	23.68	8.37	23.88	8.83
Caretaking	21.76	7.04	21.28	7.01
Emotionality	23.39	8.63	23.11	9.14
Benevolent Sexism	39.17	10.19	38.63	9.88
Hostile Sexism	33.79	10.58	33.21	10.09

Table 5: Regression Results for Significant Media Viewing Habits

	Dependency Deference	Purity	Caretaking	Benevolent Sexism	Hostile Sexism
Sexist TV Viewing	.07	-.27**	.09	-.20	.26
Equality TV Viewing	.24**	-.29**	-.34*	-.80*	-.51*
Sexist TV Preference	-.15	-.46*	.15	.37**	.10
Equality TV Preference	-.46*	-.31*	.06	.12	.36*
R^2	.02	.06	.01	.03	.02
F	6.37	18.74	2.88	7.97	4.31

*$p < .01$, **$p < .05$

Table 6: Regression Results for Non-Significant Media Viewing Habits

	Modern Sexism	Stereotypic Images/Activities	Emotionality
Sexist TV Viewing	.01	.08	-.11
Equality TV Viewing	.07	.14	.00
Sexist TV Preference	.01	-.37**	-.09
Equality TV Preference	.07	.16	.05
R^2	.00	.01	.00
F	.55	2.29	.61

*$p < .01$, **$p < .05$

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