HUMOR AS A COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGY
IN AN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

The Communication Department of the University of Delaware provides the focus for a qualitative, interpretive study that explores patterns of humorous communication within the organizational culture. A dialectical analysis of naturally occurring conversation suggests that humor balances contradictory forces in the departmental system. Humorous conversation is found to: 1) manage the tension between hierarchy and egalitarianism that emerges from the group's enactment of power structure; 2) regulate interdependence among group members; and 3) balance the forces of differentiation and integration in the group's communicative enactment of cultural identity. It is posited that differentiating tendencies are regulated by the social control functions of humor, and integrating tendencies are bolstered through the community-building functions of humor. The faculty's own metacommunication supports the claim that humor is vital in accomplishing group maintenance in the organizational culture.
CHAPTER 1

HUMOR

Most astute observers of communication have probably noticed that people employ a variety of strategies when interacting with each other. One of the most obvious communicative strategies is the use of humor. Due to successful socialization into a culture, people are generally able to recognize another's humor attempt and respond to it appropriately with laughter. Though the jocularity of others may provide us with enjoyment, however, we seldom pause to consider what humor is accomplishing in our conversation. For example, we may understand the gist of a joke, but only rarely do we investigate what communicative function the joke is fulfilling in the relationship from which it emerges. Consequently, we miss the important relational clues that humor can offer. Thus, when humor is viewed as an interactional strategy, it becomes possible to "unpack" the multiple functions and levels of meaning that patterns of humor have within an organizational culture.

The purpose of this research, then, is to expose the complex and subtle functions of humor as a communicative strategy within one specific organizational culture. The findings from such a study will provide a rich and
in-depth understanding of the role humor plays in a group's creation and enactment of its cultural identity through communication. Hopefully, the result of this exploration will be a deepened appreciation for the importance of humor in communicatively building and managing interpersonal relationships within an organization.

Arthur Koestler (1978) qualifies his examination of humor with the following analogy:

To analyze humor is a task as delicate as analyzing the chemical composition of perfume with its multiple ingredients - some of which are never consciously perceived, while others, while sniffed in isolation, would make us wince.(p. 118)

The difficulty in analyzing humor lies in its subjective and perceptual nature. Regarding the definition of humor, Sully (1902) points to the ambiguous nature of the term. He states that "hardly a word in the language... would be harder to define than this familiar one... It is often used with the greatest looseness" (p. 297). The matter is also made more complex by the myriad contextual variables which shape the social functions of humor.

The following section will attempt to delineate those functions of humor which may be relevant to social control and community-building in interpersonal, small group, and organizational relationships and interactions. Hertzler's book, Laughter: A Socio-scientific Analysis (1970), provides an in-depth examination of humor in all its varied aspects. This work will be used to build a general understanding of the functions of humor, then specific
research in the area will be presented and evaluated in light of its implications for the study of humor as a communicative form. The purpose of the following literature review, then, is to build a vocabulary that can be used to explore the ways in which humor functions in an organizational culture.

General Humor Theory

In Hertzler's (1970) discussion of laughter as a socializing agent, he points out that humor and laughter render two important services with regard to role performance. First, through self-directed humor, an individual may be able to face and resolve his or her own role conflicts. Secondly:

The laughter at role confusion, inconsistency, or ineptness makes for an articulation and underscoring of essential requirements in role performance, points to inadequacy of social action in meeting these requirements, and suggests correction or improvement. It is thus important in maintaining the role system, and contributes to group or societal support. (p. 87)

In Hertzler's view, humor and laughter as expressive forms of communication are essential elements in the group socialization process. Humor is used to inculcate and reaffirm common norms and values, to teach the essential aspects of roles and status which structure a social system, to regulate aberrant conduct, and to reinforce acceptable behavior by functioning as a positive or negative sanction.

Since socialization is effected mostly through interactions with the
people who are most significant to an individual, the laughter of these important others has great social control effect. As Hertzler states:

Especially significant is the laughter of (a) the members of the reference group which are more or less determinative in the values, choices and acts of the individual; (b) people of higher social position and of prestige; (c) people who exercise authority over the individual, or have some control over, the rewards and punishments of the individual; (d) people who are members of groups (especially organizations) that the individual is trying to imitate or emulate or join. (p. 184)

Hertzler also examines the group maintenance functions of humor. He suggests that shared laughter can unify people and open lines of communication. It can act as an indicator of reciprocity, solidarity, and compatibility, it can function to reestablish communication after conflict, and it can be used as a method of softening animosity or discord. Intragroup laughter expresses and maintains group standards, and it can strengthen group cohesiveness and morale. Shared laughter also serves to enhance relationships which have the potential for conflict, tension, and disagreement due to divergent interests or goals. According to Hertzler, disjunction is often circumvented by the use of joking or teasing in these conflict-prone relationships.

Hertzler then examines how humor is used for social control to ensure a continuation of order and effective functioning. He believes that joking is often used to encourage group members to conform to social norms. It can also operate as a way of expressing disapproval and criticism. As
Hertzler (1970) states, “It is obvious that laughter as a means of instruction, censure, and punishment becomes both socially disciplinary and socially corrective, with decided admonitive, directive, and preventative capability,” (p. 104).

Humor and laughter, according to Hertzler, have a strong role in shaping a group’s status system. This is accomplished in two major ways: laughter can function as a social equalizer or leveler, or it can serve to reinforce and maintain status differences. With regard to the leveling function, Hertzler suggests that laughter shared across status lines can open communication and push social barriers into the background, so that a feeling of equality and commonality may be achieved. On the other hand, humor can also emphasize and maintain differences between status levels. In this sense, humor can serve to acknowledge a participant’s acceptance of and belonging in the “pecking order” or status structure. This type of humor “safeguards the relationship between the representatives as they play their respective parts in their different but interrelated positions” (p. 127). Hertzler also points out that humor tends to be directed downward or horizontally through a hierarchical social structure since individuals with more power have the prerogative to regulate the intimacy of their interactions with persons of lesser power.

An entire chapter in Hertzler’s book is devoted to the hostile uses of humor and laughter. He specifies that hostile laughter is directed at or
against others, that it provides an outlet for aggressive and competitive urges, and that it can be used to reject, exclude, criticize, or ridicule deviant group members. Since laughter is normally a social, reciprocal act, the withholding of laughter can also be used with hostile intent. Hertzler suggests that laughter can be used as a highly effective weapon in conflict and power struggles as well. He cites satire and hostile repartee as two forms of humor that are often used as conflict techniques. He states:

Satire as a tool for conflict runs from bitter invective through harsh derision, ridicule, banter, and sarcasm to the most delicate irony...It is largely a device by and for the more intelligent because its effectiveness rests on logical ability, the ability to detect overstatement or understatement or the subtly incredible. (p. 155)

In contrast to satire:

Hostile repartee ... is a kind of person-versus-person encounter - a contest in expression - that usually seeks laughter as an end. It is a duel of wits between two clever face-to-face antagonists in some competitive situation involving smart verbal attack and sharp rejoinder...It is usually a deliberate playing to the gallery; the audience just sits back and laughs over each touché. (p. 155)

Hertzler believes that hostile humor is used subtly and shrewdly to exercise aggressive impulses so that the participants do not have to resort to actual physical or verbal attack. In sum, he sees hostile laughter as an economical and effective tactic in psychological warfare.

In Chapters 4 and 5, we will see that Hertzler's general observations concerning the social functions of humor can illuminate many of the
humorous interaction patterns in the organization being investigated. Hertzler's theoretical propositions also provide a background against which more empirical investigations of humor can be examined. The following section will therefore review some of the specific empirically-oriented treatments of humor and its social function.

Humor Research

A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1952) supplies us with one of the earliest conceptualizations of the "joking relationship" from his anthropological investigation of traditional cultures. Radcliffe-Brown defines a joking relationship as "a relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who, in turn, is required to take no offense" (p. 90). He believes that this type of interpersonal relationship is founded upon a combination of friendliness, comraderie, antagonism, and competition. The norms of a joking relationship require that behavior which would express or arouse hostility in other social situations not be meant or taken seriously within the context of the humorous interaction. In short, Radcliffe-Brown asserts, "there is a pretense of hostility and a real friendliness. To put it another way, the relation is one of permitted disrespect" (p. 90). Chapters 4 and 5 of this analysis will make it clear that joking relationships are major structural elements in the communication of the organizational culture being studied.
Radcliffe-Brown also distinguishes between symmetrical and asymmetrical joking relationships. In symmetrical relationships, "each of two persons teases or makes fun of the other" (p. 195), whereas in an asymmetrical relationship, "A jokes at the expense of B and B accepts the teasing good-humoredly but without retaliating" (p. 195). Radcliffe-Brown suggests from his anthropological observations that joking relationships can lead to a "stable system of social behavior in which conjunctive and disjunctive components...are maintained and combined" (p. 200). It seems that the main function of a joking relationship, then, is that it serves to maintain a satisfactory relationship between individuals who may be inclined to experience hostility or tension towards each other as a result of their mutual interdependency, shared resources, or incompatible goals.

In order to build upon Radcliffe-Brown's theory of the joking relationship, Lundberg (1969) develops a scheme which permits the systematic analysis of joking situations. The four major elements of Lundberg's system are as follows:

1. The initiator: the individual who begins the joking;
2. The target: the individual or group towards whom the joke is directed;
3. The focus: the person who is the "butt" of the joke; and
4. The publics: those persons in addition to the initiator and the target who can see and/or hear the joking.

Lundberg then goes on to build a system to symbolically represent these elements and the dynamics of the joking situation. Utilizing this symbolic
scheme, it becomes possible to analyze the social patterns of joking by specifying who (initiator) starts joking with whom (target), about whom (focus), in front of whom (publics), and with what effect on the individuals and relationships involved.

Lundberg employed his system to analyze the joking relationships in an electrical repair shop. After doing so, he asserts the following conclusions from his study:

1. Intragroup joking is often accepted by and often contributed to by the focus;

2. Intergroup joking is more likely when the initiator's group is present than when the focus' group is present;

3. Offense is often taken when the initiator is of lower status than the focus, or when the focus' group is the public;

4. Peers or members of approximately equal status of the same group have the most open, enjoyable joking relationships;

5. Low ranking foci seldom engage in reciprocal joking with individuals of higher status.

Lundberg concludes that a joking relationship fulfills a social function, that is, it "defines and redefines the differentiated social grouping, reinforces the ranking of group members, both within and between groups, and clarifies the status of one group to another" (p. 28).

Bradney (1957) also builds upon Radcliffe-Brown's conceptualization of joking relationships. In her study of a department store, she finds that
joking behaviors occur most often in situations in which the potential for conflict is high. When joking is used in such situations, it acts to relieve tension and anxiety, it reinforces social bonds, it prevents the escalation of conflict, and it also provides positive enjoyment for the joking participants. For these reasons, persons who joke readily are usually more popular in a social sense than are those who do not. Bradney's findings are paralleled by this researcher's analysis of how humor functions in a University organizational culture in Chapters 4 and 5.

Bradney also noticed that both symmetrical and asymmetrical joking behaviors clearly reflect the status structure. She found that symmetrical joking is established more quickly and easily between members of similar status levels, but that asymmetrical joking usually occurs between members of divergent ranks. Asymmetrical joking may be used by a superior to reprimand a subordinate without giving offense, and it can be employed to dispel antagonism or maintain a good working relationship between the superior and the subordinate. On the other hand, low status persons occasionally joke with higher status people in order to exercise bravado or temporarily achieve a leveling of status differences. In these cases, Bradney found that higher status members seldom joked back because such reciprocal behavior would imply an acceptance of the subordinate as an equal. Lastly, Bradney noticed that learning the norms of joking in the department store was of major importance in the successful socialization of the new employees. Thus, informal sanctions are used to mold the joking behaviors of new
employees until they were adequately assimilated into the existing patterns of joking relationships.

Handelman and Kapferer (1972) build upon the theoretical aspects of joking in their study of a sheltered workshop in Israel and a zinc mine in Zambia. They posit that joking is shaped by the social structure in which it occurs, while at the same time, it is modified by the actual emergent joking activity itself. They thus suggest that joking cannot be understood in terms of a series of disjointed acts, but that a sequential pattern of joking interactions must be viewed as a whole. Handelman and Kapferer state:

Behavior which is recognized as joking is dependent upon the expressed agreement of the participants in the focused activity...[and] before they are able to organize their interaction in terms of joking, [they] must receive a 'license to joke' from the persons toward whom their activity is directed. (p. 484-5)

Establishing a license to joke takes place through the communicative activities of the participants, and it serves to create a mutually acceptable basis for the joking relationship. The license need not be renegotiated at the beginning of each joking episode, however, because a shared relational definition may have been established through previous interactions between the joking participants.

Once a license to joke has been established, according to Handelman and Kapferer (1972), a "joking frame" is built up around it. A joking frame is a set of mutually agreed upon rules covering who can participate in the
joking activity, what verbal and nonverbal behaviors are appropriate, and what content is acceptable and/or taboo. These rules specify the degree of containment or uncontainment, and the degree of openness or closedness, which will characterize the joking patterns. If the joking is to be contained, it will exclude the participation of certain people or groups; if it is to be uncontained, then any member of the audience is free to join in. The authors state the following concerning an open joking relationship:

The characteristics selected out for comment are not peculiar to that person alone, but can apply equally to other members of the audience. Alternatively, when we state that the verbal referents are closed, we mean that they apply to the identity and attributes of a particular person or target and to no one else. (p. 485)

Handelman and Kapferer go on to specify two types of joking frames: setting-specific and category-routinized. The former depends upon local, specific resources within the joking setting, while the latter is anchored in more universal or general social conventions.

When they interpreted the results of their study within this conceptual framework, Handelman and Kapferer found that joking frames are constantly evolving, with new elements being added and old elements being eliminated. They found that setting-specific frames are more susceptible to subversion or destruction than are the more general category-routinized patterns, and they concluded that joking can only be understood “in terms of the emergent, self-generative form of the activity itself” (p. 513). They pinpointed joking sequences which served to regulate interpersonal hostility,
exert social control, and express friendship and enjoyment, but they finally conclude that “the conditions which generate the onset of joking activity may be as varied as the social context in which they arise” (p. 513). As will be seen later in this analysis, joking serves many of the abovementioned functions in the unique organizational context under investigation.

Emerson (1969) provides a conceptualization of negotiation in humor which seems complementary to Handelman and Kapferer's view. Emerson's basic assumption is that "joking provides a useful channel for covert communication on taboo topics" (p. 169) because a person is not held accountable for the implications of jest to the same degree that he or she would be for a serious statement. In other words, humor allows an avenue of retreat if the subject broached proves to be inappropriate or unacceptable to other parties. Emerson sees the central question to be: How much license may be taken with taboo subjects in the guise of humor? She states:

While it is understood that persons have some leeway in joking about topics which they could not introduce in serious discourse, the line between acceptable and unacceptable content is ambiguous. So it must be negotiated in each particular exchange. (p. 170)

When a taboo topic is transposed from humor into seriousness, i.e., when a partner takes a jokester's comment seriously, social disruption occurs because the taboo topic has been brought into the open, the negotiated license to joke has been subverted, and the framework has been changed without explicit permission. When a message is transposed from the humorous into the serious realm, the parties involved often become engaged in a struggle to
retrospectively redefine their actions and reinterpret the joking frame of their relationship.

In light of Emerson's discussion, there is one additional theoretical point which bears mentioning because it further illuminates the way in which individuals use humor in interpersonal relationships. Thompson (unpub.) suggests that communication in a group or dyad is frequently characterized by what she terms "ingrained messages". Ingrained messages refer to the condensed and abbreviated communication people use in relationships where one word or phrase will signal an entire issue or event in the relational history. These messages are symbolic, in the sense that they represent more on the relational level than the content would suggest. They evolve out of the communicative history of a relationship, and they are used more frequently as the relationship increases in intimacy. Thompson emphasizes this when she states, "As communication becomes more efficient, and as the relationship creates messages, some meaning becomes ingrained into or becomes part of the relationship" (p. 2). It will become clear, in Chapters 4 and 5, that ingrained messages form the basis of many of the "inside jokes" used in the organizational culture being studied.

Ingrained messages appear to be analogous to the mutually defined rules and patterns of humor which develop in joking relationships. Furthermore, like humor, an ingrained message can be used both as an avoidance tactic and also as a strategy to test a partner's openness to
discussing an issue. Thompson states:

Ingrained messages allow a person to bring up a topic without overtly mentioning it. Then, if unwanted conflict results, the ingrainment may be denied by the sender. These messages allowed the dyad member to 'get something off his or her chest' without being open about it. (Thompson, unpub., p.7)

In this way, both humorous and ingrained messages can function to preserve homeostasis within a relationship. Lastly, in both types of messages, the relational level frequently expresses an attempt to control the definition of the interaction between the participants. Thus, both humorous and ingrained messages are often borne of the tension between separateness and connectedness which is an integral part of interpersonal relationships (Thompson, unpub.).

Humor and Conflict

Looking at humor from a more conflict-oriented perspective, Koestler (1978) states that all humor "must contain a basic ingredient which is indispensable: an impulse, however faint, of aggression or apprehension" (p. 115). Even in friendly teasing, he believes, affection is tempered by a touch of malice, and the emotions involved in humor "always contain a dominant element of self-assertive, aggressive-defensive tendencies" (p. 130). Koestler most likely derives this orientation from the Freudian view, which, as interpreted by Berlyne (1969), sees humor as a channel to express conflict-ridden sexual or aggressive wishes that are preconscious. Berlyne cites Levine and Redlich (1955) as arguing that persons who have resolved their
unconscious conflicts concerning a humor theme, or those who have thoroughly repressed them due to the severity of the conflict, will be indifferent to any attempts at humor which stress that theme.

In a more anecdotal vein, Stephenson (1951) conducted an analysis of the conflict and social functions of joking as they are reflected in anthologies of humor. Stephenson believes that conflict and control do not exhaust all of the myriad social functions of humor, but that these two broad categories do embrace most all the other functions as subcategories. According to Stephenson:

The conflict function of humor is expressed largely by means of irony, satire, sarcasm, caricature, parody, burlesque and the like. The particular adaptability of humor as a conflict weapon lies in the fact that humor may conceal malice and allow expression of aggression without the consequences of other overt behavior... Conflict humor not only functions to express aggression but serves to strengthen the morale of those who use it and to undermine the morale of those at whom it is aimed. (p. 569)

In terms of the social control function, humor is used to express approbation or disapprobation, reinforce common sentiments, indicate friendliness, dispel anxiety, or release tensions in awkward group situations. According to Stephenson, both the conflict and the social control functions are vital to the interpersonal well-being of a group, and as will become apparent in Chapters 4 and 5, both functions are operative in the interaction patterns of the culture under investigation.
Humor and Organizations

As a corollary to the analysis of the social functions of humor, Goodchilds and Smith (1964) examined people who take the role of the wit in organized group interactions. They found that wits tend to be nonconformists and high participants in group activities; they possess a positive self-image; groups containing wits evaluated the group experience more positively than did serious groups; and the groups to which wits belonged performed better on problem-solving tasks than did other groups. Thus, it seems that no matter which social function is being fulfilled, humor tends to facilitate the group experience. The implications of this proposition for a particular organizational culture are explored in depth in Chapters 4 and 5.

Several researchers have investigated the function of humor in work and organizational settings. Fink and Walker (1977), in their study of humorous responses to embarrassment, found that humor is used to save face, that more joking occurs between people of equal status, and that the use of humor is positively associated with openness. Ullian (1976) examined the use of joking at work. He found that joking behaviors are socially patterned and that an equilibrium frequently exists among the roles of the various jokesters. He also found that an influx of new information into the system often triggers joking behaviors. He speculates that this type of novelty-triggered joking may help employees to adapt to change and thus may contribute to
organizational stability.

Other researchers in this area have found that joking helps organizational members discover potential sexual partners within their work groups (Sykes, 1968); that joking contributes to psychological survival in monotonous work environments (Roy, 1960); and that joking eases tensions among interdependent employees (Bradney, 1957). (For other organizational findings, please see Hertzler (1970), Lundberg (1969), Bradney (1957), and Handleman and Kapferer (1972) in the preceding sections.)

Coser (1959) analyzed the function of humor among patients in a hospital setting. She believes that laughter is “socially defined as a prime part of the interactive process, of the give and take of social life” (p. 171) because reciprocally shared laughter implies and creates a common definition of relational reality. Coser found that among patients, jocular griping is used to ease anxiety and temper the need to submit to rigid authority and a strict routine. It functions as a “collective expression of an individual complaint” (p. 176), and as such, it increases morale, reciprocity, cohesiveness, and a sense of equality among the participants. Jocular talk is founded upon shared experience:

It unites the group by allowing it to reinterpret together an experience that was previously individual to each... and by generalizing it and making it the property of all, the individual sufferer is dispossessed of his [or her] own suffering. (p. 178,179)
Coser also noted that elements of exaggeration, self-aggrandizement, and make-believe in jocular talk imbue it with a performance quality, and she believes this quality contributes to a bonding between jokester and audience. Finally, she asserts that jocular griping performs an integrative function which stabilizes the social structure of the hospital. Through humor, patients are able to express discontent and hostility, redefine their helpless positions, confront their private fears on a collective level, and reciprocally entertain and reassure each other in such a way as to facilitate their struggle towards physical and mental health. As will be seen in Chapters 4 and 5, similar functions of humor are enacted in the academic culture which provides the focus for this investigation.

Coser conducted another institutional study in 1960 to investigate the social functions of humor among the staff at mental health hospital. In this study, she examined the use of humor in relation to the status and role networks which structured the interactions of the staff members. Contrary to Freud's (1916) assertion that low status people use humor to conceal and at the same time express aggression and rebellion against authority, Coser found that low status staff members use fewer witticisms than those higher in the authority structure. In fact, Coser states, "The average number of witticisms per member were 7.5 for senior staff, 5.5 for junior staff, and 0.7 for paramedical staff" (p. 84). She points out, however, that just because low ranking members express less aggressive wit in staff meetings, it does not necessarily follow that these individuals are less hostile than high status staff;
actually, they may just find outlets for their aggressive humor in other less formally structured settings. Coser asserts:

Those who are on top have more right to be aggressors; those who are low in the hierarchy are not as freely permitted this outlet, even if it appears under the guise of humor... Humor tends to be directed against those who have no authority over the initiator. (p. 85)

Thus, she concludes that tensions are released downward through humor, and in this way, humor supports the status structure.

Coser (1960) noticed that low ranking staff members often use or offer themselves as targets of humor. She believes this decreases social distance since it “permits authority an expression of its own aggression through laughter” (p. 87). In addition, a humorous remark can have subversive characteristics since it can divert attention away from a meeting agenda and temporarily remove control from the high status members in charge. There are two nonsubversive ways in which humor is used without disrupting the social order: the highest ranking “person-in-charge” can initiate joking and thus still be in control, or a low status person can offer his or herself as a target and thus reinforce the social structure. Coser also asserts that humor can help to resolve social conflict, role conflict, and values conflicts in such a way that it reaffirms the group as a collective, interdependent organization.

Coser (1960) goes on to suggest that humor is a vital element in the
socialization process. She explains why it can socialize effectively:

Humor negates its own content. By ridiculing the victim it also informs him [or her] that it is not serious, that they can all laugh about it together. Humor permits one to simultaneously attack and lend support... it accuses and reassures, and it does both through consensus marked by laughter (p. 91)

However, since humor has at its heart at least a kernel of aggressiveness, and it can serve to level social distance, it must function within the bounds of rules that prevent it from being destructive to the social structure. When it does so, the releasing of aggression or anxiety in a humorous manner may make it possible for group members to avoid having minor disagreements escalate into overt hostility. As Coser puts it, “Humor helps to convert hostility and to control it, while at the same time permitting its expression” (p. 95). This socializing, regulating aspect of humor is analyzed in detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

In this section thus far, we have seen that humor is often used to effect socialization, entertainment, group maintenance, social control, and/or the expression of aggression in conflict situations. It should now be clear that humor is enacted through patterned symmetrical or asymmetrical joking relationships. These joking relationships grow out of both parties implicitly granting each other a license to joke, then negotiating the rules of their relationship into a joking frame (Handleman & Kapferer, 1972). In each joking incident, there exists an initiator, a target, a focus, and publics (Lundberg, 1969). Lastly, it has been emphasized that the use of humor in
organizations is complex and multifaceted, but that it usually functions to maintain and reinforce the organization's social structure.

**Pragmatic Perspective**

From this discussion, then, it appears that the strategies and styles of humor that participants employ in a joking relationship can be affected by a host of variables and can operate on more than one level of the relationship. It is here that the pragmatic perspective, most succinctly expressed by Watzlawick, Bavelas, and Jackson (1967), can be used to illuminate many of the relational elements of communication in humorous interactions.

The pragmatic perspective of Watzlawick et al. stresses the fact that communication creates a relationship, and that the relationship in turn creates communication. The emphasis here is placed upon mutual influence in systemic, cyclical patterns of interaction. In other words, two roles or behavior sets together create a relationship, but without a relationship in which to define them, no roles are possible. Watzlawick et al. (1967) summarize the centrality of communication and mutual influence in a relationship when they state, "Any communication implies a commitment and thereby defines the relationship" (p. 51). They then go on to propose a more precise method of analyzing the way in which communication defines a relationship.
Watzlawick et al. postulate that "every communication has a content and relationship aspect such that the latter classifies the former and is therefore a metacommunication" (p. 54). This perspective posits that all messages communicate information on two levels: the content and relationship dimensions. The content dimension conveys the primary information or idea of the message, whereas the relational dimension defines and provides information about the actual relationship. In other words, the relational level of a message is metacommunicative. This perspective, which recognizes dual levels in a message, is useful because it emphasizes that the words a humor participant uses may indicate one message on the content level, while the same words may convey quite a different meaning when the relational implications of the message are considered.

The pragmatic approach to communication also offers other conceptual tools which can facilitate the study of humor. Watzlawick et al. (1967) suggest that relational styles can generally be classified into one of two patterns of interaction: complementary or symmetrical. A complementary relational pattern is one in which the participants behave differently, with the behavior of one serving as a stimulus for complementary behavior from the other. This type of interaction tends to maximize the differences in the behaviors of the individuals involved. A symmetrical pattern, on the other hand, refers to a relationship in which the participants tend to mirror each other's behavior. Symmetricality is characterized by equality and the minimization of differences in the behaviors of the relational participants. As
Wilmot and Wilmot (1978) state, "Symmetrical relationships are characterized by open striving for the same types of control in the relationship" (p. 40). Both complementary and symmetrical patterns of humorous communication were discovered in the organizational culture under investigation in this study.

Watzlawick et al. stress that neither the complementary nor the symmetrical style is inherently more preferable than the other, and that both styles can result in either functional or dysfunctional outcomes. They elaborate upon these ideas by suggesting that the messages used in the two relational styles can be characterized as either "one-up" or "one-down" messages. Speaking of a complementary relationship in particular, they suggest that "one partner occupies what has been variously described as the superior, primary, or 'one-up' position, and the other the corresponding inferior, secondary, or 'one-down' position. These terms are quite useful as long as they are not equated with 'good' or 'bad', 'strong' or 'weak' " (p. 69).

Thus, a joking relationship could be characterized by one of two communication styles: a symmetrical style of either one-up or one-down messages, or a complementary style consisting of a combination of interlocking one-up and one-down messages. Watzlawick et al. also point out that pathologies can occur in both types of relationships. In the complementary style, the danger exists that rigidity in one-up/one-down roles will come to block change and evolution in the relationship in a dysfunctional
way. In the symmetrical style, there exists a danger that escalating symmetry will develop from competitiveness and that a power struggle of "one-upsmanhship will ensue where each person tries to better what the other has just contributed" (Wilmot & Wilmot, 1978, p.40).

Watzlawick et al. (1967) postulate that "all communicational interchanges are either symmetrical or complementary, depending on whether they are based on equality or difference" (p. 70). Wilmot and Wilmot (1978) however, cite Lederer and Jackson (1968) as positing a third type of relational definition: the parallel style. In this third pattern, "The participants develop flexible styles for relating and vary between establishing their power in symmetrical and complementary ways" (Wilmot & Wilmot, 1978, p.40). The parallel style of communication, then, is one which avoids rigid patterns and is characterized by a flexibility that can adapt and evolve with relational change. It may involve "one-across" messages which employ a leveling effect to neutralize relational control. Parallel patterns of humorous communication are represented in the organizational culture described in Chapters 4 and 5.

In this chapter, empirical findings and theoretical concepts pertaining to humor were presented to build a vocabulary for an analysis of the ways in which humor functions in the enactment of an organizational culture. The next chapter will explore the theoretical underpinnings of the method that was used to structure the investigation.
CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF QUALITATIVE CONVERSATIONAL ANALYSIS

To summarize the foregoing discussion, it should be evident that humor is characterized by unique communicative patterns that evolve out of interpersonal relationships. Since all communication, including humor, contains both a content and a relational level of meaning, humor can be used as a means of negotiating relational definitions and creating a social reality. The joking relationships that result are governed by implicit rules that guide the behavior of the parties involved. In organizations, joking relationships are often established to manage the tension between cooperation and competition that frequently exists among interdependent individuals; thus, humorous tactics can be used to control other parties, gain compliance from them, or just reinforce the comraderie that is necessary for cooperation. It follows from this that humor can result in either integrating or differentiating relational outcomes, depending on how it is enacted communicatively.

In sum, the research findings and theories delineated in the preceding discussion strongly indicate that an in-depth analysis of humor as a communicative strategy is needed in order to more deeply understand the
Joking relationships, however, are not static, objective “things” that are amenable to dissection and reductionistic inspection. They are processes which evolve and change and are influenced by a host of contextual and historical variables. A holistic method is needed to expose the patterns of humor while keeping their depth and richness intact. Therefore, in order to evaluate whether or not the theoretical concepts suggested by the literature review are actually operative in real-life communication, this researcher will employ a descriptive/interpretive method to study how humor functions among interdependent University faculty members in the naturally occurring context of departmental meetings. Naturalistic investigation will be used because it can preserve the integrity of the interpersonal relational patterns out of which humor emerges, and it also can provide greater external validity than can experimental manipulation or self-report questionnaires. Nofsinger (1977) believes that communication, as a discipline, needs the in-depth descriptive and interpretive work that the naturalistic paradigm entails. He explains:

If [it is] correct that we do not understand communication very well, perhaps it is because we have not carefully observed, described, and interpreted its everyday occurrences. (p.14)

The following analysis, then, can be thought of as a qualitative study, one in which the natural communication of an organizational culture is described and
interpreted to create a picture of group interaction that transcends individual perspectives (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982).

The data analysis in this study adhered to the fundamental assumptions of the naturalistic paradigm. In this paradigm:

People are assumed to be active, purposive, self-monitoring and self-justifying systems whose behavior arises in pursuit of their goals and their making sense of themselves and each other... Accordingly, people's everyday communication and the mechanisms of logic they employ in accomplishing it are taken to be the fundamental level of analysis. (Nofsinger, 1977, p.12)

Researchers in the naturalistic paradigm often treat organizations as cultures which are created and sustained communicatively (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982). They assume that organizational reality is socially constructed through language, symbols, and interactive behaviors, and that research should aim "to discover, synthesize, and interpret the role of symbolic forms in constructing and maintaining an orderly reality" (Putnam, 1982, p.194).

The naturalistic paradigm usually entails a pluralistic perspective in which organizations are viewed as shifting coalitions of people with diverse goals; consequently, the multiplicity of perspectives which constitute organizational reality will be incorporated into this interpretive analysis. The naturalistic paradigm is also characterized by a relativistic, as opposed to objectivistic, point of view in which organizational culture is thought to be a
fluidly evolving process, rather than a concrete and objectively verifiable entity (Putnam, 1983).

In addition, the naturalistic researcher assumes that context is one of the most fundamental elements in any communication exchange. Erikson and Schultz (1977) point out the all-encompassing nature of context when they state that “social contexts consist of mutually shared and ratified definitions of situation and in the social actions persons take on the basis of those definitions” (p.6). This definition takes context beyond the physical environment and into the social environment where different rules and behaviors come into play as interactions evolve communicatively. The naturalistic researcher focuses upon how individuals derive meaning from interpreting their own and others’ actions within the framework of the dynamic relational context. As Rawlins (1980) states, “The meaning of a given social action depends on the context where it occurs, but the precise nature of the context is continually negotiated through interaction” (p.21). Thus, in this investigation, cultural context is assumed to play a critical role in shaping interpersonal realities as they are enacted communicatively.

The naturalistic/interpretivistic paradigm that was used in this study differs from the traditional functionalistic/objectivistic paradigm of social sciences in many ways. As Putnam (1983) states, “Interpretivists aim to understand social phenomena by extracting the unique dimensions of situations rather than by deducing generalizable laws that govern social
behavior" (p.40-1). She continues:

Interpretivists focus on the historically unique situation; they study naturally occurring phenomena; they become immersed or involved in the lives of the people they study; and they approach their tasks in a more flexible, iterative manner than do functionalists. (p.44)

This researcher thus attempted to identify "the details of non-random patterns of everyday life" (Nofsinger, 1977, p.15) instead of striving to discover fundamental laws of nature, as would the functionalist.

Wilson (1977) points out that the interpretive approach can be desirable in its transcendence of traditional deductive research "because quantitative researchers are restricted within their own perspectives, [and] they risk being concerned about irrelevant variables" (p.250). The qualitative researcher, in contrast, uses a data-driven, fluid approach which avoids forcing the phenomena being studied into rigid a priori categories. As Kaplan (1964) explains, to the qualitative researcher, "The principle 'let's get down to something we can count!' does not always formulate the best research strategy; 'let's see now, what have we here?' may point to a more promising program" (p.171). In accord with Kaplan, Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982) assert that this interpretive, qualitative approach is more appropriate for studying the communication patterns that constitute organizations than are the more traditional social science methods such as experimentation or survey research. They state:

As a context, culture is amenable not to causal analysis, but to interpretation... that reveals the nuances of sense-making in the
discourse of cultural members. As interpretation, an account of organizational culture begs not for assessment of its reliability and validity, but for an assessment of its plausibility and insight. (p.123)

The above statement illustrates that qualitative research often moves beyond deductive, quantitative social science methods to embrace methods which have been traditionally associated with ethnography. The ethnographic research method, when applied to communication, typically includes some of the following stages: data collection, transcription, description of communicative action, general classification of episodes, consideration of context and actors' own interpretations, and comparison of conversational functions, patterns, and processes (Nofsinger, 1977). Nofsinger describes the process in the following way:

The researcher...will observe the enactment of episodes, note what kinds are enacted, attend to how they get started, describe the talk which creates the episode, and track each episode to its conclusion as it evolves toward fulfillment of the participants' goals (which are themselves evolving during the episode). (p.15)

During the process outlined above, this researcher followed ethnographic tradition, attempted to be open to the data, and refrained from forcing them into a priori categories as much as possible. Of course, all human beings are guided by tacit classification schemes when making sense of their experiences, but ethnographers intentionally cultivate their ability to suspend their preconceived expectations. As Wilson (1977) states, "They study prior research and theory as much as the traditional researcher, but
they then purposely suspend this knowledge until their experience with the research setting suggests its relevance” (p.251). Putnam (1983) addresses this same issue of flexibility and openness to data when she states:

A researcher might begin with *a priori* categories and hypotheses and then search out data to disconfirm these explanations... Researchers who employ these methods revise and reformulate their categories, tentative interpretations, and even their research topics...through an iterative process of integrating data with observed experiences... [These] researchers gather rich data: thick descriptions saturated with contextual and cultural overtones. (pp.43,44)

It is precisely this dynamically evolving method that was employed in this research to analyze humor use in an organizational setting.

The method of suspending preconceived theoretical categories when analyzing data opens up the possibility of achieving in-depth description, understanding, and even explanation of communicative interactions. Traditional social science researchers, however, often lose much of the richness of communicative data since they usually do not study conversation as it occurs in natural settings; instead, they first reclassify it according to predetermined categories and then assess categorical frequencies (Nofsinger, 1977). In criticism of this approach, Cronen and McNamee (unpub.) state that “the imposition of ready-made schema upon the content of messages in a particular conversation not only loses some information, it may lose the most crucial information” (p.3). They suggest that the most effective way to expose the dynamic patterns underlying communication is to validate any classification scheme with consideration of both the actors’ own idiosyncratic
meanings, and also the researchers' own subjective perceptions (gained through involvement in the research setting).

Taking Cronen and McNamee's suggestions, researcher involvement became a central element in this ethnographic analysis. Putnam (1983) addresses this issue when she explains what "inquiry from the inside" can achieve:

The researcher learns from becoming part of the process and from combining his or her own experiences with unobtrusive measures, interviews and other methods. By becoming familiar with the rules and expectations of the organization, the researcher can envision with some degree of accuracy organizational events and consequences of events. The researcher, through personal knowledge, becomes an analog of the organization... [and] learns the language of the actors, assembles their texts, and then derives a sense of unity from interpreting the whole in light of its parts... Interpretations are verified through consistency of social meanings and organizational practices. (pp.43,47,48)

From Putnam's perspective, an ethnographer must be involved enough in the communicative context to be able to perceive the actors' perspectives, while at the same time, he or she must remain far enough removed to perceive the underlying patterns which operate below the actors' level of awareness. This researcher was in a unique position to maintain such a balance because of her role as a "psuedo-faculty member", i.e., a graduate teaching assistant who was at the same time a student and an instructor. The liason role enabled the researcher to understand the shared departmental culture that formed the context for faculty meeting communication, while it
also enabled her to maintain the outsider stance that is necessary for a global perspective.

Specifically, the ethnographic method of conversational analysis was used as a basis for interpretation and description in this research. As Bantz (1983) states, "The ethnomethodologically oriented researcher who follows a conversational approach typically focuses on the verbal discourse used to constitute an organizational culture" (p.59). He or she does not attempt to discover the communicator's intentionality; instead, the researcher explores what talk accomplishes within the context of interpersonal relationships. The focus of the investigation, then, is the what and how, as opposed to the why, of conversational interaction. Nofsinger (1977) believes that this orientation stems from the naturalistic assumptions that talk provides empirical data and that communication is worth studying in and of itself. Nofsinger summarizes the essence of the ethnographic method when he states, "Discourse analysis is [the] careful, descriptive, critical exploration of everyday communication which makes the unnoticed 'visible', the commonplace remarkable, and the familiar require an explanation" (p.14).

The discourse analysis perspective posits that conversation should be treated as a unit of analysis in and of itself (Greenberg, 1975), and that naturally occurring conversation provides a particularly rich data source for sociolinguistic study (Ervin-Tripp & Mitchell-Kernan, 1977). Hickson (1977) believes that ethnographic research should emphasize the descriptive study of
people interacting communicatively in their natural environment. Therefore, in this study, the naturalistic method of conversational analysis was used to describe and interpret how humor is used in communicative interactions.

A dialectical approach to the functions of humor structured the analysis of the data. The dialectical perspective focuses upon organization as an emergent process which is characterized by four main principles: 1) the social construction of reality; 2) the importance of the totality as opposed to the parts; 3) the enactment of contradiction; and 4) the evolution of praxis, i.e., change (Benson, 1977). Principle 3 will be used to guide the analysis because a dialectical schema of contradictions emerges clearly from the data. As Benson states:

The social order produced in the process of social construction contains contradictions, ruptures, inconsistencies, and incompatibilities in the fabric of social life... Some of these are necessary features of a particular order. (p.4)

According to Benson (1977), contradictions can be either system-integrative or system-destructive, and “participants may try to reach their objectives by managing or manipulating the combinations of contradictions” (p. 16). Putnam (in press) elaborates further on the management of paradox by suggesting that organizational members respond to inconsistency in one of three ways: 1) they accept one of the messages and ignore the other; 2) they deny neither message and function within the contradiction; or 3) they transcend the contradiction with a creative alternative. In Chapters 3 and 4,
it will become clear that humor is used to enact the third alternative because it functions as a mechanism for creatively transcending the opposing forces of a contradiction by enabling a complementary balance to be achieved. Thus, humor was viewed as a means of regulating contradiction in a system-integrative manner, and the way in which humor is used by group members to manage paradox towards the fulfillment of their own and the group's objectives was the focus of the analysis.

In summary, this researcher followed the naturalistic assumption that organizational cultures are built and maintained through communication, and thus conversation was treated as a manifestation of culture. Naturally occurring discourse was qualitatively described, dialectical patterns were interpreted, and context, the actors' meanings, and the researcher's own perceptions were used as elements of the organizational text (Putman, 1982).

The broad context of the following analysis is the University of Delaware. The specific context of the study is the organizational culture of the Communication Department. Departmental faculty meetings provided the conversational data for an interpretive analysis of humorous communication. The study was guided by the researcher's intention to explore how humor is used in the faculty's communication, and to illuminate what functions it serves within the culture as a whole. With the theoretical background now in place, the following chapter will address the specific methodological details of the conversational analysis performed.
Subjects

The participants in this study were the 13 full-time faculty members and six of the full-time graduate students who were members of the Communication Department at the University of Delaware in 1980. During the series of conversational samplings, which were recorded in 1980, the subject population remained relatively stable. However, the graduate students attended faculty meetings on a rotating basis, with one new student (current year appointment) and one experienced student (prior year appointment) attending each session. Thus, meeting attendance was sporadic among graduate students. Of the 13 faculty members, eight were male and five were female; two were tenured, six were tenure-track, four were non-tenure-track, and one was a tenured departmental Chairperson.
Sampling Strategy

During the fall semester of 1980 (October through December), Paula Welldon (1981) taped a total of five regularly scheduled faculty meetings in their entirety. Each meeting was approximately one to one-and-one-half hours in length. Welldon recorded each meeting with a concealed tape recorder and microphone located well above the eye level of faculty members seated at a conference room table. Recordings commenced when the meetings began at approximately 4:00 and were terminated at the conclusion of the meeting. Faculty members were aware their conversations were being recorded, (they had signed informed consent documents), but most were not aware of the purpose or the rationale behind the research.

One of Welldon's five recordings was not used in the data analysis. This tape was excluded because the presence of a high status outsider (a dean) substantially altered the communication dynamics in the meeting.

Tape Transcription

Welldon (1981) transcribed each tape and marked the transcripts to identify speakers by their first names only, thus protecting the identity of her sources. This researcher has taken the additional step of changing the names of all faculty members to further guarantee anonymity. Welldon also marked distinct episodes in the transcripts whenever a "sequence of conversation
occurred which maintained a common focus of attention or centered upon a common topic” (p. 53).

Data Analysis

This investigator used the following parts of the organizational text to enrich the data base and to illuminate the groups' definition of cultural reality: faculty meeting minutes, the researcher's own knowledge of the culture via personal experience, the paralanguage exhibited in the tapes of the meetings, and the transcripts of the actual discourse.

In the analysis of the tapes and transcripts, humor was defined as a communicative act that is delivered with an apparently non-serious intent and is followed by laughter or some other indication that the audience recognizes a humor attempt.

A series of steps structured the investigation. First, the researcher listened to the tapes and read the transcripts analytically to gain an understanding of how humor is used in the culture, what it accomplishes, and in what conversational contexts it occurs. The researcher continued to study the communication until patterns of humor use emerged from the data. These patterns were then examined to determine what, if any, logical structure underlay them. Next, the researcher described and interpreted the humor patterns according to a dialectical conceptual schema that grew out of
an intensive study of the discourse and the culture within the Communication Department. This schema is based upon the fundamental claim that humor functions to manage contradiction in a system-integrative manner. Two further specific claims arose from this premise: 1) humor functions as a means of communicatively enacting the power structure of the group, and 2) humor is central to the group's enactment of its cultural identity. The former claim provides the focus for Chapter 4, and the latter structures the analysis in Chapter 5. Concepts and terminology derived from the literature review are used to provide a vocabulary for these discussions, and episodes of actual conversation are employed to illustrate and support the schema that emerged from the investigation. Thus, the next two chapters present a descriptive/interpretive analysis of how humor functions as a communicative strategy within the organizational culture of the Department of Communication.
CHAPTER 4
ENACTMENT OF POWER STRUCTURE

When observing the interactional patterns of the Communication Department faculty, outsiders and insiders alike are frequently struck by a trait which seems to characterize the Department's communication style; that trait is *humor*. Humorous interaction is a key cultural component among the faculty group, and the norm that encourages humor use is within the awareness of the group members to the extent that they can and do metacommunicate about their humorous relational style\(^1\). An additional indication of the prevalence of humor is that folklore within the University of Delaware suggests that the Communication Department has a reputation for levity above and beyond that which is common in other departments\(^2\). The norm of using humor even when communicating about serious issues has, at times in the past, made it difficult for people outside of the culture to decipher the meaning of the communication that occurs within the

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\(^1\) See section entitled *Metacommunication* in Chapter 5

\(^2\) The basis for this claim is the researcher's own experience in interacting with people outside of the culture. For example, the director of the University's Career Planning and Placement Office stated, "You're from the Communication Department? That's a really funny bunch over there. They're competent at their work and have a good time doing it, too."
Department. The frequent use of “inside jokes” and cultural ingrainments compounds this problem of interpretability for outsiders, but at the same time, it serves the vital function of creating and reinforcing the sense of comraderie, cohesiveness, and morale that is necessary for the group’s communicative effectiveness.

In addition to community-building, humor serves many other complex and subtle functions in the group’s interaction. It structures communication in faculty meetings in the following ways: humor is used to get the floor, to steer the conversational topic, to gain recognition, and to command attention, among other things. Humor also brackets each meeting, that is, each meeting begins and ends with humor, laughter, simultaneous talk, and phatic communication. This humor bracketing functions to reestablish group identity and cohesiveness at the beginning, and attain positive closure at the end of each interaction. Other structural patterns that emerge from a study of the meeting transcripts and tapes include periods of monologue or serious talk being followed by humorous episodes which encourage participation, and humorous digressions being used frequently when sensitive subjects are discussed.

There are many other microstructural functions of humor in the

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3. This difficulty has occurred, for instance, when candidates have been brought in to interview for faculty positions and have become confused or uncomfortable from the group’s jocularity.
faculty's communication, and some of these will be discussed later. The major focus of this interpretive discussion, however, is a more macroscopic one in which the functions of humor will be considered from a dialectical, cultural perspective. This approach will address the social construction of reality as it is created and reflected through humor. Humor will thus be treated in Chapter 4 as communication that allows the group to enact important facets of its power structure. Chapter 5, on the other hand, will focus upon humor as a means of communicatively enacting the cultural identity of the group.

The discussion of the enactment of power structure that follows in this chapter will explore the ways in which humor is used to balance the tension that exists between two dialectical forces in the group's culture. These two forces are hierarchy and egalitarianism. To facilitate the investigation, specific examples of humor use in power-negotiating, compliance-gaining, and status-leveling interactions will be employed to illustrate how humor regulates the contradictory tendencies towards hierarchy and egalitarianism in the group's enactment of power.
Hierarchy vs. Egalitarianism

When examining power in an organizational culture, a basic contradiction or paradox often becomes obvious: most organizations must, to some degree, balance competing needs for task accomplishment and social maintenance, for structure and flexibility, and for leadership and participation. In the Department of Communication, this dialectical configuration emerges from the tension between hierarchy and egalitarianism, and it is often played out in the faculty's humorous interactions.

Basic to the Communication Department's culture are deeply embedded and explicitly acknowledged norms of egalitarianism, informality, participative decision-making, flexibility, and sociability. The faculty pride themselves on their relaxed but competent approach in which first names are used by their students, and the use of titles among fellow faculty is considered pretentious. Witty bantering is the characteristic communication style at all levels of the hierarchy, faculty meetings are supposed to be enjoyable as well as productive, and an appearance or actuality of consensus-seeking is the norm for most departmental decisions. On the other hand, however, the group needs to function effectively and efficiently, and to accomplish its tasks, there must necessarily be some degree of leadership, structure, and differential control. In addition, though downplayed, seniority, tenure, and rank are clearly important structural facets in any university department.
It is this researcher’s claim that the tension between the norm of egalitarianism that is crucial to the social identity of the group, and the hierarchy of position and status that is necessary to the group’s task accomplishment, is frequently balanced and regulated through the use of humor. Humor can thus function as a correction mechanism when the dialectic becomes imbalanced; as well as a vehicle through which both parts of the power dialectic are enacted. Contradictions are an inherent part of any organizational culture, but they can be either constructive or destructive for the system; humor, as a balancing device, enables participants to manage contradiction in a way that is functional for the system as a whole.

Power informs all communicative acts; to speak with another is to engage in reciprocal influencing since both parties will be altered in some miniscule or substantial way as a result of the encounter. Power is also a basic element in the social construction of reality: those with power can shape and define events and a group’s culture. Power thus infuses the faculty’s communication even though the explicit exercise of power is considered to be taboo. Since the norm of egalitarianism is so strong in the Communication Department, humor is used to enact power and gain compliance in indirect and subtle ways. It is also used in a status-leveling manner to undermine control maneuvers and enforce adherence to the egalitarian norm.

The following diagram represents the hierarchical and egalitarian
patterns discussed above. This dialectical conceptual schema will be used to analyze the ways in which the power structure of the culture is enacted through humorous communication. In the three sections of this chapter, the discussion will focus upon three particular contexts of humor use: opening power negotiations, compliance-gaining, and status-leveling.

**Enactment of Power Structure**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hierarchy</th>
<th>Egalitarianism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>leadership</td>
<td>participative decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>structure</td>
<td>flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>task accomplishment</td>
<td>social focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F1 communication</td>
<td>F2 communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>status/position</td>
<td>informality</td>
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**Contexts:**
- opening power negotiations
- compliance-gaining
- status-leveling

**Opening Power Negotiations**

An interesting pattern in the faculty’s communication relates to the above-mentioned power jockeying: each of the four meetings analyzed begins with a series of communicative acts in which power is exerted, resisted, and negotiated until all are apparently satisfied with the balance and are ready to engage in more task-oriented communication.

Edelsky’s (1981) idea of *floor-type* is helpful here in understanding the power jockeying and evolution of communication that take place in each
faculty meeting. Edelsky posits that there are two distinct types of conversational floor. The first type, F1, is the "orderly, one-at-a-time type" (Edelsky, 1981, p. 384), while the second type, F2, is marked by "an apparent free-for-all" (p. 384) where the norm is communicative collaboration and participation. McLaughlin (1984) summarizes the distinctions between these two floor types:

F1s, which were more frequent than F2s, were characterized by the following: people took fewer, but longer turns; there was more frequent use of the past tense; there was a greater use of the reporting function; and there were more side comments and encouragers. Generally, F1s were concerned with agenda-managing activities. F2s, on the other hand, were characterized by more turns that shared the same meaning; more laughing, joking, and teasing; more "deep" overlapping; little apparent concern for interruption; and more topics on which more than one person was informed. (p. 107)

From this researcher's perspective, it is in the transition between these two floor types that the Communication faculty engages most obviously in struggles of power assertion and resistance. Since the function of a leader is essentially to guide the group from an F2 to F1 communication style in which tasks can be accomplished, and since the meetings of the Communication faculty invariably begin with F2 communication to reaffirm the cohesiveness and comraderie of the group, the leader must exert some degree of power to catalyze the shift in floor type. Thus, the initial portion of each meeting provides rich data illustrating the ways in which the power tension between hierarchy and egalitarianism is enacted through humor and other communicative strategies.
The facets of the power dialectic discussed so far are illustrated in the first several episodes of meeting one. As is typical in most University departments, the Chair of the Communication Department usually assumes the leadership role in faculty meetings. (The Chair in this faculty group will be referred to as "Robert"). The October 9, 1980 meeting begins with the simultaneous chatter, joking, and laughter that is typical of F2 communication and appears to perform the social function of reestablishing a sense of comraderie morale.

Episode 1 opens with the Chair posing an indirect bid for control; he does so in the form of a question that apparently leaves it up to the group's discretion whether or not they are ready to begin F1 communication about the business at hand, i.e., "You guys ready?" The response is an immediate "No."

Using this as an indication that an attempt to exercise leadership would be premature, in Episode 2, Robert initiates a joking sequence that focuses upon the taping of the faculty meetings:

Robert: We're going to - all these meetings are being recorded, uh, for academic purposes.

Peter: Sounds about right.

Robert: So act natural. (Laughter)

Charles: (Unintelligible) your presidential papers.

Robert: And s-one thing we want to do, is speak in a normal voice. (Laughter)
Pamela: Do we need to do a voice check?
Steve: Enunciate clearly.
Robert: Enunciate clearly, but be natural. Don't make reference to the fact nor alter your speech pattern when you consider this is being recorded. (Laughter)
Ruth: Somebody kick him down there. (Laughter)
Michelle: Okay.
Robert: Item...One. (Laughter)
Steve: Delete the expletives. (Laughter)
Peter: Way to screw up somebody's research. (Laughter)
Ruth: Poor Polly. (Laughter)
Kevin: Can you imagine - twenty percent Laughter? (Laughter)
Ruth: Can you imagine transcribing this? (Laughter)
Steve: I hope she just erases it. (Laughter) (Garbled)

The above humorous interaction is characteristic of the group's F2 communication. In general, when the group members engage in F2 communication, someone initiates a joking theme, then others collectively elaborate on it by adding short witticisms in rapid succession. In these sequences, not all the group members actively participate in the humorous expansion of the theme, but usually all do join in the laughter in accordance with the norms of sociability, informality, and equality of participation.

Episode 3 of the opening power negotiation in this meeting unfolds
as follows:

Robert: Now I'll tell you what I'd like to say. I would like to make—

Steve: Then you'll tell us - then you'll tell us what you...(Laughter)

Robert: — a very brief

Ruth: (Unintelligible) speaking.

Andrew: Good technique of military instruction. (Laughter)

Steve: Yeh, right.

Robert: — presentation about the future of the Communication Department.

Peter: Oh, shit. (Laughter) Must you?

David: Well, I thought we heard this the other day.

Michelle: You kiss your mother with that mouth, Peter? (Laughter)

Steve: That again?

Charles: (Unintelligible).

In Episode 3, the Chair apparently attempts to initiate the transition to serious discussion via a direct and rather forceful effort to exert his power as a leader and thus gain communicative control: “Now I'll tell you what I'd like to say.” It is this researcher's claim that Robert's power move violates the following norm: the Chair must lead the group in indirect and subtle ways so that the dialectical equilibrium between hierarchy and egalitarianism does not become imbalanced in favor of the former. Robert can thus be viewed as being caught in a role conflict with two contradictory sets of rules; he must lead and thus enact his higher status and power, but he must do so
without violating the norms of participation and egalitarianism that are so vital a part of the group's cultural identity. It seems that the only way the Chair can fulfill both sets of requirements is to exert control indirectly, and his attempt in Episode 3 is apparently too direct for group comfort.

What ensues is that the group members communicatively sabotage the leader's attempts to exercise power and initiate an F1 interaction style. They do so by interrupting Robert, transposing the communication back into the humorous realm, and maintaining an F2 floor-type through digression, jokes, and laughter, thereby avoiding the demand that they relinquish control. After being interrupted, the Chair continues his sentence where it left off as though no break had occurred. This act can be viewed as an indirect way to gain control by ignoring resistance and transposing the topic from the humorous back into the serious realm.

When Robert finally finishes his serious statement about what he wants to discuss, several group members respond in a status-leveling way to counter his attempt to enact his hierarchical leadership power; that is, they engage in put-down humor that disparages the topic proposed by the Chair, (i.e., “Oh, shit,” “Must you?”, “Well, I thought we heard this the other day,” and “That again?”).

In Episode 4, the Chair drops his effort to seriously discuss the proposed topic, and instead, he indirectly challenges one faculty member's
impertinent behavior:

Robert: What kind of nonverbal cue is it when someone’s reading a journal when you’re trying to (unintelligible)? Is that - is that - is there a nonverbal cue? (Laughter)

Charles: I just learn from my students. They read newspapers and do crossword puzzles (unintelligible) and drowse... (Laughter)

Ruth: It’s called modeling behavior. (Laughter)

Scott: I think it’s tenure-seeking behavior. (Laughter)

Robert: (Unintelligible) speak in class until they have them down. That - that’s an interesting technique. That works, too.

Michelle: Makes for a silent class, but...

Charles: I would never have to open my mouth if I did - if I did that. (Laughter)

David: It’s a cheap way to make a living, Charles. (Laughter)

Charles: Yeh. You bet. (Unintelligible).

In the above interaction, Charles, by his behavior of reading a journal, implicitly denies that the Chair has the power to command attention. Robert counters this power challenge through humor: “What kind of nonverbal cue is it when someone’s reading a journal when you’re trying to...?” This appears to be an effective strategy, since enacting hierarchy through humor does not violate the egalitarian norm because, as was suggested in the literature review, there is usually an implicit agreement that people will not be held accountable in the serious realm for what they say in the humorous realm.
From this researcher's perspective, Charles' response to Robert's humorous admonishment is a further enactment of hierarchy. Charles diffuses his accountability for his own behavior by blaming it on those convenient scapegoats who occupy the bottom rung on the ladder of power and who are not present to defend themselves, i.e., "I just learn from my students". Robert then comments about a way to counter student rudeness: he suggests that he usually will not speak until the offenders cease reading their newspapers. This seems to be the Chair's indirect way of criticizing Charles' actions by using student behavior as a metaphor for Charles'. It is an effective power move on Robert's part because it implicitly equates Charles with a youngster who needs to be disciplined; it does so, however, all within the realm of humor. Charles finally uses one-down, self-directed humor to bring an end to the joking admonishment by displaying humility: "I would never have to open my mouth if I did that." During this Episode, the other faculty members chime in with witticisms as part of the friendly repartee and humorous one-upsman ship that characterize their F2 communication.

In Episode 5, the Chair again seems to attempt to initiate a shift to F1 communication. This time, he emphasizes his seriousness as a means of explicitly transposing the interaction from the humorous realm back into the serious realm:

Robert: It occurred to me that - I think that what really occurred to me - I'm quite serious about this - I was - I was...
Charles: Great. Great bunch of people.

Unknown: Great bunch.

Peter: Don't believe that.

Robert: You guys are so nice; you dress up all the time, and (unintelligible). Now, it occurred to me - I talked to the - to Helen Gouldner, the dean, this morning, as is my custom a couple times a month, (Laughter) and it occurred to me that—

Michelle: You can tell. He has a suit on.

Robert: — I probably never talked to you all about the kinds of things that I try to do to get more money and more chairs and more tape recorders and that kind of thing. Um...

Michelle: I don't think I want to hear this. (Laughter)

Peter: What the Dean is really like. (Laughter)

Ruth: We do a thing like this in Interpersonal. It's called the bragging exercise. (Laughter)

Robert: What - what if - un - unfortunately, it's not going to be. Um, I wish it were. Um, I don't really ever feed back to you—

Charles then counters the subtle admonishment he received in Episode 4 by interrupting Robert; this interruption accomplishes a leveling of the Chair's status because it denies him his hierarchical right as a Chair to command the floor. The theme Charles introduces is echoed by two other group members, and Robert responds by joking in acknowledgement of the interruption theme. The Chair's responsiveness serves to indicate that he is "one of the guys" and can participate in the F2 communication, but it also acts as a device for gaining the floor in a socially acceptable manner. Once
Robert has secured the floor by participating in the F2 joking, he transposes the communication back into the serious realm and again tries to initiate F1 communication. The Chair ignores one interruption and continues to speak, but he is then interrupted again by a joking sequence that parodies his serious statement and thus refuses to legitimize his right to command the floor. For example, Ruth uses put-down humor to diffuse the credibility of Robert’s message in a status-equalizing way: “We do a thing like this in Interpersonal. It’s called the bragging exercise.”

To summarize, in Episodes 1-5, it is this researcher’s claim that the Chair tries several times to initiate serious F1 discussion, and he reacts to challenges and interruptions indirectly: he either ignores them, or he uses joking to acknowledge and participate in the F2 communication, then while he has the floor, he tries to initiate a shift to a task focus again. Here the conflict between the dialectics of hierarchy and egalitarianism, leadership and participation, and task and social focuses can be seen clearly; the Chair struggles to lead the group into F1 communication while, at the same time, trying to use his power indirectly and participate in the comraderie that the F2 communication creates. The group members react to the Chair’s leadership attempts with status-equalizing responses of one-upsmanship and repartee. They do not acknowledge that his differential status should give him the right to speak unchallenged and uninterrupted until they decide willingly to relinquish the floor. It is posited that through these strategies, largely enacted via humor, the group makes it clear that the Chair’s power is
something that can only be given by the group, not something that can be taken from the group by the leader.

Finally, at the end of Episode 5, the Chair diffuses Ruth's humorous parody with a one-down, humble message. At this point, the group at last accepts Robert's leadership and allows him to exercise his power, cloaked as it is now in humility instead of hierarchy, to initiate the shift into an F1 communicative pattern. What follows for two long episodes is communication that is typical to the F1 type of floor: the leader is permitted long turns which convey information and facilitate agenda-management, and discussion is orderly and serious.

The use of humor to enact the power structure can also be seen in the initial seven episodes of the October 23, 1980 meeting. In the first Episode of this meeting, the power struggle begins in the opening two turns. The Chair makes an uncharacteristically unilateral (and possibly facetious) assertion of authority: "I demand total silence. Is everybody ready?" Ruth replies rebelliously, "I think that's a good reason to not be silent." Here Robert's enactment of hierarchy is challenged and undermined by Ruth's enactment of status-leveling egalitarianism. It appears that Ruth, by refusing to treat Robert's power move as a joke, transposes it back into the serious realm where he is held responsible for his violation of the egalitarianism norm, and she then indicates that she resists the power move by a one-up message.
Episode 2 of this meeting proceeds in the following manner:

Robert: Okay, let me tick off... We've got a lot of things to cover today. Fairly of them –

Ruth: See, Kevin's late, too.

Kevin: (Unintelligible). (Laughter)

Peter: I guess that means we'll be here late.

Robert: No, if we can start on time. (Laughter)

Scott: Whoa! We're waiting for somebody to take a leadership role. (Laughter) (Garbled).

David: Why don't we just sit around and wait for one to emerge? (Laughter)

Robert: I don't want any excuses, Kevin. (Laughter)

David: Here, pull it up to the table.

Michelle: Yeh, we like to keep all the ties on this side of the table.

Scott: We could take a vote.

As can be seen above, after the initial power jousting in Episode 2, Robert again attempts to be overtly directive, and he initiates F1 communication before the group has had its customary period of F2 communication to reaffirm comraderie and morale, i.e., “Okay, let me tick off... We've got a lot of things to cover today.” Ruth again sabotages his power move, this time by interrupting to comment upon Kevin arriving late to the meeting. Robert responds by interjecting a comment which implicitly criticizes the inefficiency of the group's F2 social communication: “If we can start on time...” The group reacts to this comment with laughter, thus
effectively diffusing its power as a serious control move.

Scott next responds to the Chair's attempted enactment of hierarchy and leadership with status-leveling put-down humor: “Whoa! We're waiting for someone to take a leadership role.” He enacts the norm of egalitarianism by implying that the Chair's leadership is ineffective, and the group responds with laughter, thus bringing Robert down to equal status with the rest of the group.

David's follow-up joke uses shared knowledge of communication theory to imply that a leader should emerge from the will of the group, rather than being assigned to that position as a result of a hierarchical status (i.e., “Why don't we just sit around and wait for one to emerge?”). The group greets this comment with uproarious laughter that affirms its subtle status-equalizing effects. Robert does not acknowledge the put-downs about his leadership, however; instead, he jokingly violates the egalitarianism norm by adopting a stern, authoritarian stance towards Kevin's lateness: “I don't want any excuses, Kevin.” The group members' laughter indicates that they interpret his comment as humor because it is so clear a violation of their interactional norms.

Episode 3 continues as reproduced below:

**Ruth:** Have you noticed how nicely Kevin's been dressing lately? (Garbled). Well, you real - you really look nice, Kevin.
Kevin: Well, now I'm (Unintelligible).

Ruth: We're hoping that other people will carry on with your example.

Kevin: Well, that's what I told Robert. I thought we need a little class, y'know. (Garbled)

In this Episode, Ruth takes control of a topic (Kevin's dress) that normally would not be talked about in a faculty meeting. What she accomplishes by making a trivial point into an elaborate discussion is that she counters Robert's power moves by monopolizing the floor with irrelevant discussion.

In Episode 4, Robert asks for permission to change the floor type from F2 to F1 (i.e., "Ready?"), thus acknowledging that power must be given to him by the group. Scott gives an affirmative "Yeh", then Robert directs a sarcastic, put-down question to Ruth, ("Are you through with the tie - talking about the tie, Ruth?") indicating that he recognizes that her assertion of power is in defiance of his hierarchical right to authority and control.

Episode 5 develops as follows:

Robert: Now, we have a few things that are not particularly important. Let me get through those first. Number one: someone has the video cabinet key with the green dot on it. Please return it. (Laughter)

Pamela: The strawberry gig again, eh?
Andrew: We will all cover our eyes. (Laughter)

Peter: Oh, shit. (Laughter)

In Episode 5, Robert attempts to initiate F1 communication to get through the agenda tasks at hand. His serious statement, however, is not taken seriously by the group; it is transposed into the humorous realm and is greeted with laughter and a short sequence of F2 joking on the theme he introduced (i.e., “The Strawberry gig again, eh?”, “We will all cover our eyes,” and “Oh, shit.”). The group members are apparently resisting Robert’s efforts to steer them from the socially-oriented, egalitarian, F2 communication style with which they typically begin meetings, into the leader-directed, serious, F1 communication style that facilitates task accomplishment.

The group members also enact their resistance in Episode 6 through parodying Robert’s assertion that he has departmental advertising competently under control. Robert, however, ignores the status-equalizing parody and proceeds to click right along to the next topic:

Robert: Job description for the public relations/advertising person is completed, proofed, duplicated and is in the...

Kevin: Did you - did you circle that one (unintelligible).

Robert: We have a system of advertising.

David: We have a system – put it into a bottle. (Laughter)

Robert: Yeh, yeh, right.
Episode 7 contains an interesting power struggle between Robert and Ruth. Robert is communicating in a more serious and task-oriented manner in this meeting than he does usually, and Ruth, in turn, is responding with more challenges and rebellion than is her usual style.

**Robert:** Um, freshmen grades are due Friday. Apparently this is a fairly important aspect of what the university is doing now, and some of us have freshmen in courses, and they really want to know if they're not passing or not. The - the scan sheet with the brown, or whatever it is, is - is very easy to do, so get - get it in by...Yeh.

**Ruth:** So even we should be able to handle it. (Laughter)

**Robert:** Even you should be able to handle it. Please don't give it to Betty on Friday, because some people...

**Pamela:** That's tomorrow.

**Robert:** Yeh, I know. They're kind of due there on Friday, and if they go out in the campus mail, they get there on Monday.

**Scott:** Well, somebody's going to pick them up. Well, somebody's going to pick them up.

**Ruth:** No, they don't go in campus mail. The person comes in at noon, so Betty said if you give it to her before noon, it's okay.

**Robert:** Is that the grade coordinator again? Okay.

**Ruth:** God, I wish our Chair would check out these things ahead of time. (Laughter)
In this Episode, Ruth makes a humorous remark (i.e., "So even we should be able to handle it") that portrays Robert as being condescending, and thus in violation of the egalitarianism norm, when he emphasizes the ease of filling out freshmen grade forms. Instead of denying the implied accusation, the Chair repeats Ruth's remark directly to her as a put-down message that functions as an enactment of hierarchy: "Even you should be able to handle it."

Ruth later responds to Robert's one-up message with her own one-up direct contradiction of Robert's information: "No, they don't go in campus mail..." Robert's come-back is a satirization of Ruth as a know-it-all with a self-made position of importance (i.e., "Is that the grade-coordinator again?"). Ruth ends this sequence of symmetrical escalation and one-upsmanship with a criticism of Robert's performance in his hierarchical position as Chair. She quips, "God, I wish our Chairman would check out these things ahead of time." She attacks him at his power base, and in so doing, she indicates that egalitarianism is still the fundamental social reality, in spite of any lofty position Robert might occupy in the hierarchical status and power structure. Thus, in this opening episode, we have seen that humor is used to enact power negotiations between the group members and their leader.

The November 6 meeting opens with an even more explicit enactment of the power tension that exists between hierarchy and egalitarianism in the Communication faculty culture. The meeting begins
with the Chair setting up a podium and preparing to speak to the group while standing behind it. This act constitutes a flagrant violation of the regular procedure in which all faculty members are seated around a table. It also functions as a clear symbolic assertion that the Chair is above the other group members in the status and power hierarchy. Upon noticing this anomalous behavior, several group members immediately challenge Robert and attempt to persuade him not to use the podium:

Ruth: Aw, come on!

Charles: Is this the new communication style of Robert?

Ruth: It should be new communicative style.

Michelle: Robert, actually, you really shouldn't use a podium. That - that in fact infers that you are A) hiding something, and B) so insecure that...

Ruth: We don't even let our students use podiums.

Michelle: That's right.

Ruth: Maybe you should take COM 250...

Robert ignores these comments in Episode 2, and he officially begins the meeting with an announcement that the humorous communication style of the previous meetings will now be changed to a serious one. Robert thus uses metacommunication to explain and justify his behavior of tipping the balance towards hierarchy and away from egalitarianism:

Robert: Okay, several things have changed since we last met. Uh, during the graduate meeting there was unanimous, uh, agreement that we should change the style of the - of the meetings.
Charles: What planet were you on? (Laughter)

Ruth: Was this, uh, a different meeting —

Robert: So —

Ruth: — than the one we all attended?

Robert: This - this is going to be the new style, and everything is
going to be very serious.

Charles: Is this what we call the product of, uh, consensus in decision-

making?

Unknown: Seig Heil! Seig Heil!

Robert: This is it.

Ruth: So he asks us what we want and then does the opposite.

Robert: That's - that's correct. Shall we just get this over real fast.

Unknown: So that's —

Unknown: Are —

Ruth: Are we going to take this sitting down? (Laughter)

Scott: Yes.

Charles: No, we should — (Garbled).

Ruth: I think we need a whole revolution! (Laughter)

Michelle: What is this shit, Robert? (Laughter)

Ruth: We'd really be more comfortable with you sitting down
amongst the rest of us, Robert.

Charles: Yes, Robert.

David: Either that, or give us all podiums. (Laughter)

Michelle: Please, bwana. (Laughter)
In the above Episode, Charles and Ruth respond to the Chair's bizarre behavior with put-down humor. Robert replies emphasizing the change to seriousness (i.e., "This-This is going to be the new style and everything is going to be very serious."). At this point, it seems as though Robert might be exaggerating the issue facetiously; his messages, however, appear to be disturbingly ambiguous to the group, and they cannot decipher whether he intends his meaning to be interpreted in the humorous or the serious realm. Charles uses sarcasm to point out Robert's violation of the consensus norm: "Is this what we call the product of, uh, consensus in decision-making?", then another group member parodies Robert as a dictator (i.e., "Seig Heil! Seig Heil!"). Robert, however, does not give the group any reassuring indication that he is just joking; instead, he continues to respond brusquely and seriously to the group's objections and criticisms.

Throughout this Episode, Ruth is one of the most vocal group members in expressing her indignation. She becomes more and more rebellious and firm in treating the norm violation seriously, and at one point, she issues a battle cry to rouse the others to defensive action (i.e., "Are we going to take this sitting down?" and "I think we need a whole revolution!"). At this point, the group members laugh and rise to the defense of the norm of egalitarianism (i.e. "What is this shit, Robert?"). Ruth then explicitly states what the group wants and expects of Robert: "We'd really be more comfortable with you sitting down amongst the rest of us, Robert." Charles echoes and reinforces her message, David
jokingly represents the egalitarianism norm by saying, "Either that, or give us all podiums," and Michelle adds the begging supplication, "Please, bwana," all amidst general group laughter.

In Episode 3, it is not clear whether or not the Chair has relinquished his podium, but he introduces a new topic without having responded to the old or having made it clear whether he was being facetious or serious:

Robert: May I present to you the new graduate poster?

Michelle: Oh, my. That's really snappy, isn't it?

Scott: Did we vote on this one?

Charles: The same way we voted on, uh, Peter's (unintelligible).

Ruth: Last year.

Scott: Oh, last year, okay.

Charles: Communuh... (unintelligible).

Peter: You could be doing your graduate work at Delaware? (Laughter)

Michelle: Sucker.

Ruth: Hey, that's good.

In this Episode, the group members greet the new Communication poster presented by Robert with wit, sarcasm, and critical laughter that serves to reassert their power and undermine his unilateral control.
In Episode 4, Robert responds to Peter's facetious parody of the poster and the implied criticism by diffusing its force with a joking fantasy sequence:

**Robert:** Whether you know it or not, under the influence of —

**Peter:** I thought we were going to put, say, would you please? (Laughter)

**Robert:** — of strong medication, you okayed this in the hospital. Don't you remember when we came over that day? Ruth and Charles were there. We have evidence that you okayed it.

**Ruth:** Oh, right! That's right!

**Peter:** Is that right?

**Ruth:** He was also (unintelligible). He said, oh yeh, out on 896! (Laughter)

**Peter:** Under anaesthesia. (Laughter) (Garbled)

**Michelle:** ...give you too much money.

**Peter:** That was the one by the - that must have made an impressive line.

**Charles:** He was high on - he was high and low.

**Ruth:** It was great. It was great. (Unintelligible).

**Robert:** I - I arrived just after you'd had a shot, and, uh, we - they had —

**Charles:** Feeling no pain. (Laughter)

**Robert:** -the mockup, and you thought it was really great.

**Peter:** Really? I mean, I don't — It goes to show you what a Demerol cocktail will do for you. (Laughter)

**Michelle:** It's kind of a shame to get back to reality.
Peter: Anything looks good.

Robert's fantasy theme in this Episode is that Peter actually approved of the poster once when he was under medication. By his behavior in this sequence, Robert indicates that he is, at least, not completely determined to eradicate all humorous communication from faculty interactions. Robert initiates the joking sequence, but others join in elaborating on it with shared laughter and an apparent sense of comraderie. Peter himself goes along with the joking, and though he concludes the sequence by again disparaging the poster, the humor has functioned to diffuse the force of any criticism he might levy towards it. This researcher claims that in this Episode, Robert's enactment of hierarchy is successful, effective, and in accord with group norms. He apparently exercises his leadership powers indirectly to dispel criticism, while at the same time, he reaffirms egalitarian comraderie through encouraging participation in social joking and F2 communication. At the end of this Episode, perhaps as a result of Robert's behavior being in accord with the norm of egalitarianism, the group finally permits him to successfully initiate the shift to F1 communication and serious interaction.

In this discussion so far, the opening episodes of three faculty meetings have been examined in detail to illustrate the ways in which the faculty's actual communication enacts the dialectical tension between hierarchy and egalitarianism in the exercise of power. (The November 11
meeting was excluded because it is a Graduate Faculty meeting with different leadership dynamics at the beginning.) From this analysis, it is claimed that the initial portion of each meeting has distinct elements of power negotiation; humor is often used in this negotiation to balance the contradictory needs for leadership and participation, task accomplishment and social maintenance, and structure and flexibility.

These contradictions are clearly played out in the dynamics of leadership: the Chair must indirectly guide the group from the F2 communication that characterizes the beginning of meetings to an F1 style that facilitates agenda-management. To make the issue more complicated, even though the leader has successfully initiated an F2 to F1 transition, there is no guarantee that the group will not return to F2 communication. In fact, the interactional patterns of this faculty group are such that periods of F1 communication are frequently interspersed with tension-relieving and camaraderie-building episodes of F2 joking and banter. Thus, it is claimed that the Chair must continue delicately steering and guiding the group's communication throughout the entire meeting, and humor is an indispensable strategy in this process of interaction management.
Compliance-Gaining

Many instances exist in the data where the Chair of the Department must exert his hierarchical influence to gain compliance from the faculty members on some particular issue. The Chair's leadership strategies when attempting to gain compliance from others are essentially the same as those which he uses to get the meetings under way; that is, he often uses indirect communication and humor that make his control moves more palatable to the group. There are two specific issues that emerge in the October 23, 1980 faculty meeting that illustrate the myriad subtleties required of a leadership style that tries to balance the tension between hierarchy and egalitarianism. These two topical sequences will be examined in this section.

The first compliance-gaining sequence to be discussed concerns the introduction of a new form which the faculty must fill out to report their use of time. In these episodes, an essential point to consider is that the faculty members have no choice concerning whether they will or will not comply with the new Activities Report Form: it is a University requirement. However, the key to Robert's effective leadership is that he allows the faculty to voice their resistance and objections anyway. By doing so, and by negotiating with them using humor and other indirect techniques, he is able to finally gain their compliance without ever having had to command it in an authoritarian manner. In essence, it is this researcher's claim that the Chair demonstrates his skill at balancing hierarchy and
egalitarianism by making the group members feel as though they have a choice and can voluntarily comply when, in actuality, their compliance is required by the larger University hierarchy.

Robert begins the sequence by delivering a brief introductory monologue that explains the background and the genesis of the new form. The group members immediately begin showing their resistance to change and potentially increased demands by making fun of the form itself.

Robert: ....And this is the sheet. I want you to get ready for this.

Ruth: Uh-ohh.

Kevin: Multi-colored.

Robert: Wha-This is a multi-colored three-part job.

Pamela: What if you make a mistake?

Ruth: Uh-oh.

Robert: All right.

Ruth: Whooo.

David: It's pretty.

Judith: It's pretty anyway, huh?

Robert: This is - This is the equivalent of Schaeffer city. (Laughter) You've got multi-colored jobs, that's page number one ...

Pamela: Oh yeh.


Robert: This is page number two. It's twelve parts.

Pamela: Oh, you're kidding!

Ruth: It was bad enough before!

Peter: This is optional, you said? (Laughter)

Robert: The last one in section twelve has to do with, um, administration.

Ruth: Who's bright idea was this?

Peter: I'm reserving match for that. Right now. (Laughter)

Robert: Well, Tony Graziano.

Scott: Well, why don't you talk to our AAUP representative? (Laughter)

In this episode, Robert's initial comment, "I want you to get ready for this," allows the group to engage in a witty joking sequence that seems to lower their actual resistance through catharsis. Comraderie and morale also appear to be bolstered through the shared laughter, and Robert participates in the humor in a status-equalizing way. In essence, he adopts the role of "one of the guys" and portrays the inconvenience as originating outside the culture, in the "world out there" of the larger University context. This researcher claims that the Chair's technique is effective in reducing intragroup resistance because cohesiveness tends to increase when a situation is defined in "us against them" polarities.

The topic next shifts from joking criticism of the form itself to put-
down humor directed towards the individual thought to be responsible for originating the form. After this theme has been played out amidst much laughter, Robert suggests that the group members might understand the new form better if they went to a series of workshops offered by the University. Probably knowing that he can expect further resistance, Robert presents the idea of the workshops not as mandatory, but as a tool for making things easier for the faculty. He also uses the egalitarian technique of emphasizing his identification with the group's perspective, (e.g., "I came away from the meeting with a different feeling than I went in. My reaction was yours. I saw this thing, and I said, 'I cannot believe this thing. This is incredible!'").

Robert then apparently begins to build his case for compliance in earnest. He brings up the hitherto unacknowledged fact that when filling out the old form, group members surreptitiously asked others what numbers they were using, and then they put down the same numbers as did the others. It seems that hearing the Chair admit to "fudging" the old form makes it safe for others to admit to doing so, and thus several group members elaborate on their own exaggerated time estimates. It is suggested that this sequence achieves two purposes: it builds a sense of comraderie and cohesiveness, and perhaps more important for compliance-gaining, by getting the faculty members to admit to faking the old form, Robert sets up a situation wherein they may see its flaws and thereby become more favorably inclined towards the new form.
Robert next states that "...while I'm not into this kind of thing, because it's productivity and results that are important, we do need to...y'know, to use this, because a lot of this information is enormously helpful to our department." Here Robert portrays himself again as "one of the guys" who does not like the form more than anyone else, but even he can see how it will be beneficial to the group.

During this entire discussion, Robert's communicative pattern has been to enact a persuasive strategy, joke along with the group for a while, then enact another one from a slightly different slant. An important part of Robert's compliance-gaining strategy thus seems to entail actively participating in the humor sequences. It is claimed that this communicative behavior accomplishes the following: 1) it minimizes the group's perception of his exercise of hierarchical persuasive power; and 2) it maximizes the group's perception of egalitarianism and consensus decision-making. The Chair's strategy is apparently effective, because after extensive negotiating and discussion, Charles and Ruth initiate the "coming around" stage in which they speak for the group as intending to comply with demands of the new form.

At this point, the group's communication shifts to an F2 style of witty repartee where virtually every comment elicits shared laughter. A sampling of this segment is reproduced below.

**Ruth:** Do we need to attend one of those workshops in order to
understand the form in order to be able to fill it out?

Robert: I think after the one I went to, you're going to be a lot happier if you will, because you-you-you'll know how to fill it out better, and you'll feel a little bit better about it. (Laughter)

Ruth: Just like a therapy session! (Laughter)

Peter: How can you feel good about going to a session to- to learn how to fill out a goddam form? I mean, how can you feel good about that? (Laughter)

Andrew: How long are these sessions?

Charles: Peter rounds out the edges. (Laughter)

Robert: I felt good, not only about this form, but about myself. (Laughter) (Garbled)

Charles: Robert, this is a variation of, I'm okay, the form's okay. (Laughter) (Garbled)

Robert: The reason that I found it to be an enjoyable experience is that, because I had to go to the meeting ...

Michelle: Because you're a sick man! (Laughter)

Scott: He was sitting behind somebody. (Laughter)

Robert: I tried to pay attention to the information that was being delivered, and I watched the interactions of those who were giving me information. That's better often. Never watch the people who are giving the presentations; watch the people in the audience. Don't you all do that? (Laughter) If you don't do that, then ....

Peter: I think I will if I go to this!

Charles: Will Tony be conducting the hell sessions? Do you know?

Robert: I don't know. But shall I - shall I send him a note saying there are a lot of Eye-talians in the department? (Laughter)
David: When is this going ...

Charles: We want Tony! We want Tony! (Laughter)

Peter: Ya know, if we had a strong union here, we wouldn't have to do this stuff! (Laughter)

This researcher claims that the change in communication style from F1 to F2 above affirms the norms of participation and egalitarianism by allowing the group members to create a shared social reality through humor, and it also functions to end the discussion on a positive note of comraderie. The focus of the joking sequence is the workshop that is necessary to learn how to fill out the forms; since the group members have a shared understanding that having to attend a workshop to fill out a form is absurd, the theme provides ample ammunition for parody, sarcasm and wit in which everyone, including Robert, can participate.

In summary, the sequence as a whole illustrates how the group and its leader manage the tension between hierarchy and egalitarianism when enacting the power structure. It is claimed that Robert uses the indirect compliance-gaining strategies of participating in humor, minimizing his power position in the hierarchy, portraying the situation as one of choice, and building cohesiveness by emphasizing shared experience. The result appears to be that the group members' resistance lessens because the egalitarian norm is not being directly violated. In sum, the fact that the group members eventually comply with Robert's wishes suggests to this researcher that the
Chair is indeed skillful at using indirect power strategies to balance the dual necessities of ensuring fulfillment of bureaucratic requirements, while at the same time, abiding by the group norms of consensus and egalitarianism.

The second specific episode of compliance-gaining communication to be examined occurs immediately after the sequence discussed above. The topic of this second sequence is faculty telephone use. The Chair introduces the new topic in a rather humble, one-down manner: "Okay. I only have one-one final item, and that is, are you ready for this?...Telephone calls?" Even though Robert initiates this discussion in an indirect, nonauthoritarian way, the group still immediately resists. In response to their complaints, Robert offers to postpone the discussion until the next meeting, and this act of offering choice to the group diffuses their resistance (e.g., one faculty member replies, "No, no, not next time. Let's have it").

Robert then introduces his main point in a very indirect way through humor: "If any of you have been watching the ad on television about the cost..." The group responds with laughter, and Charles and Peter take the Chair's message to its humorous conclusion by saying, "Reach out and touch someone?" and "There's too much touching going on on the phones." Robert soon jokingly validates their interpretation by concluding, "Reach out and touch someone at your own expense." In this exchange, Robert uses humor and indirectness to allow the group to draw its own conclusions, thus freeing him from the necessity of exercising his power.
directly. It can thus be posited that the Chair employs humor to balance the dialectical tension between the group's contradictory needs for leadership and egalitarianism, and through humor, he is able to minimize group defensiveness and resistance to his compliance-gaining attempts.

The sequence continues with F2 communication, characterized by witty repartee of one-liners and responsive laughter, as the group discusses several other facets of the telephone matter. Then, at one point, Peter forces Robert into a more direct and explicit statement of the issue by asking, "Well, c-could you-could you perhaps state the problem first? I-you just said phones. What's the-what's the matter?" Instead of using his hierarchical power to state the issue and demand compliance, however, Robert responds in an egalitarian manner; he minimizes the problem, uses positive reinforcement of desired behavior, portrays group members' lack of compliance as only hurting themselves, and leaves compliance open to each member's personal choice, all in a gently humorous manner that evokes shared laughter from the group members. Robert then goes on to portray the current telephone billing system as a service that benefits each faculty member, stressing the positive side of the issue.

At this point the group erupts into a new joking sequence that enacts playful resistance to Robert's compliance-gaining attempts. The sequence is initiated by Charles in response to Robert's suggestion that they write letters more frequently instead of making telephone calls: "Reach out
and write someone?...Reach out and type someone?...Goddamn it, I want an IBM typewriter then!"

Peter then alters the joking theme by refocusing it on hierarchical issues:

Peter: I think you should-I think you should take the phones away from us. (Laughter)

Robert: Okay. (Laughter)

Michelle: I think we should all slap Peter's wrist.

Peter: We'll put them in your office until we learn how to use them properly. (Laughter)

In this sequence, Peter jokes by portraying Robert as the punitive parent and the faculty members as small children. This humor theme strikes a resonant cord for the group because it seems to be the impression that the Chair tries hardest to avoid communicating; he has couched his compliance-gaining attempts in a "no big deal", humorous, indirect approach to avoid violating the egalitarianism norm and thus generating rebellion and resistance. It is claimed then, that the force of the humor in this episode comes from Peter making explicit, through parody, that the faculty members are quite aware that the Chair is attempting to gain their compliance and subtly castigate them, in spite of his indirect and humorous leadership style.

Robert next introduces a story that appears to generate strong comraderie and cohesiveness, and it also diffuses resistance by providing a rebellious model with which the group can vicariously identify. The story
focuses upon Steve, a faculty member who refused a proposal several years ago that the faculty members should share phones. Robert builds up the introduction to the story over several turns, then he delivers the key story-line: “Steve said that as a - as a professor in this department, y’know, as a - he didn’t have access to many things, and wasn’t entitled to much, but Goddamn it! He thought he ought to have a telephone!” The group responds to the story with uproarious laughter, applause, and cheers of “All right! Hey, all right!” and “Give ’em hell, Steve!”

This story serves the purpose of emphasizing the norms of egalitarianism and consensus decision-making via a hero who assertively stands up for his own and the group’s rights. Thus, Robert effectively uses the humorous story to balance his own indirect assertion of hierarchy as he attempts to gain compliance concerning telephone issues. After the story and some further negotiation of understanding, the discussion draws to a close, and the group members’ compliance is implicit in the concluding communication. It is claimed that this communicative sequence has shown, then, that humor and other indirect strategies allow the Chair to enact his power in such a way as to successfully maintain the delicate balance between hierarchy and egalitarianism.
Status-Leveling

As has already been mentioned, there are many incidents in the faculty meetings in which humor is used in a status-leveling manner to enact and reinforce the norm of egalitarianism. Four specific sequences which illustrate this function of humor clearly will be discussed in this section.

The focus of the first sequence to be examined is that of faculty evaluations of the Chair. This topic appears to be an uncomfortable one for both the group members and the Chair because it involves collapsing the hierarchical power of the chairmanship into the egalitarianism of faculty assessments. The sequence is thus characterized by the use of humor to dispel the tension of status-leveling.

The Chair initiates discussion of the topic with an invitation to the group members to evaluate him. When one person inquires as to how they would do that, the Chair diffuses some of the initial tension by jokingly playing ignorant (i.e., “I have no idea”). The group responds with laughter, one member parodies the process, then the former Chair uses self-directed joking to portray his previous resignation as having been a result of faculty evaluation (i.e., “Wait a minute! You guys evaluated me and I resigned!”). Robert uses this theme as an opportunity to jokingly parody his own apparent insecurity about being evaluated: “Come to think of it, don’t do anything yet!”
At this point, the faculty members embark on a joking sequence that is characterized by status-equalizing put-down humor. Peter jokingly implies they want to oust Robert from the chairmanship, and several others elaborate upon this theme. Andrew, however, gives Robert a way to save face by jokingly portraying the situation as Robert's own decision to step down from the chairmanship (i.e., "Maybe he's looking for an easy way out!"). There is much laughter throughout this episode, and it functions to release the tension that is generated when the group humorously violates the taboo against criticizing the Chair.

In the next episode, the group's joking criticism is redirected towards a member who is not present. This joking sequence is based upon the shared knowledge of the person in question being irresponsible, and by posing her as an alternative Chair, the group comparatively expresses support for the current Chair. The joking theme developed here seems to function as an outlet for the criticism that had to be repressed earlier since both the Chair and the former Chair were present. Implied in this criticism session is also a condemnation for the faculty member's apparent violation of the norm of egalitarianism and shared responsibility (i.e., "Yeh, but once you're tenured, you don't have to - have to come to faculty meetings, so... "). Charles then offers the excuse, "She missed the memo! Uh, she-she didn't have the memo for this meeting, that's the reason!", thus parodying the focus' absent-mindedness, and further illustrating her perceived irresponsibility.
It is interesting in a hierarchical sense to note that in this episode, the joking criticism is being levied by non-tenured faculty, and it is directed towards a senior tenured faculty member. It serves the function of leveling the status of the senior member and is thus a way of enacting the norm of egalitarianism. In this light, it is also noteworthy that the joking parody is diffused only when the tenured, high status Chair offers a justification for the other tenured member's absence: “Anne is in Minn-Minnesota.”

The group returns to discussion of the evaluation process in the beginning of the next episode. Robert projects an air of uncertainty as he explains the evaluation process, so Charles quips, “You've heard of a slam book?” Robert goes on to suggest, “If there is a procedure or you would like to - that you would like to establish in writing, nonverbally, verbally, or whatever, I'm...” Ruth then interrupts Robert by humorously pointing out the absurdity of Robert's suggestion that they evaluate him verbally or nonverbally (i.e., “We'll act it out!”). Peter next enacts a hostile joking put-down: “I'd like to just come in and tell you off, is that - is that possible?” This crack is greeted with uproarious laughter, perhaps because the joke draws its humor from a fantasized violation of hierarchy, i.e., “telling off” the person with the highest status in the department. Robert responds with one-down acceptance of the status-leveling humor enacted by Peter: “Everybody does that.”

In the next episode, Robert's use of self-deprecating humor indicates
that he may be aware of his vulnerability in this situation of collapsed hierarchy. He jokes, "Most of you come in and vent your anger anyway... and say, 'Robert, you're not doing a very good job in this respect,' so it's not that we're not communicating," and the group responds with shared laughter. Here Robert is criticizing himself on behalf of the group members, probably since the norms of comraderie dictate that they cannot attack him publicly in a direct way even if they do have criticisms they would like to make.

Also in this episode, the faculty members enact further status-leveling communication by implying through humor that they would evaluate the Chair negatively (e.g., “Don’t sign your name, but...” and “When we start bringing in candidates to interview...He’ll get the message.”). Though this humor implies a subtle put-down and equalizing of Robert’s status, it also ironically appears to express an indirect message of support for Robert. There seems to be an implied message that the group would not be joking about negative evaluations if they truly felt negatively or desired to evaluate Robert poorly. Thus, there appears to be an implicit assumption present that makes the enactment of put-down, status-leveling humor possible; that assumption is that the norms of loyalty and supportiveness would prevail if a real evaluation were to take place.

To summarize the implications of this sequence, then, it is apparent that humor is used both by Robert and by the faculty to enact the status-
leveling that must accompany a shift in power from the Chair to the group (i.e., whereas Robert usually wields the power, the evaluation of the Chair shifts the power to the group members who will judge him). It is claimed that humor thus functions to regulate the tensions between hierarchy and egalitarianism that result from the temporary modification of the power balance. Lastly, it is this researcher's belief that the laughter that results from joking serves the important function of providing a constructive outlet for any feelings of discomfort the group members might experience as a result of the conflicting and contradictory social forces at work.

The second status-leveling sequence to be examined is one in which, as in the episodes above, it is Robert's position that is being equalized. Whereas the above sequence is directed towards Robert's hierarchical position as Chair of the Department, however, the status-leveling in this episode focuses upon Robert's prestige as a prolific researcher and an internationally known Middle Eastern communication expert. The sequence arises from a discussion of the faculty biographies that appear in the Communication Graduate Student Handbook.

Steve: ...Everyone should have their name, rank, serial number and what they do, uh, in a paragraph in this - under the faculty thing.

Peter: Oh yeh, I recall that.

Steve: Look at yours if you've written one; if you haven't, please do-

Peter: There's an awful lot there for Robert. (Laughter)

Steve: -so we can get it.
Peter: How'd you get all that?

Robert: Does that tell about when I went to high school? (Laughter)

Charles: He just listed every country in the Middle East. (Laughter)

Robert: Does that tell about the senior play? I was in the senior play. (Laughter)

Steve: No, no.

Peter: It tells about his last summer vacation. (Laughter)

Steve: It says something about Abadabadabadabadaba. (Laughter)

Robert: Does it say that Abudabi really means "Father of Dabi?" (Laughter)

Charles: It says "Grant proposal for McDonald’s." (Laughter)

Though the joking sequence is brief, it serves an important function in the group's interactional dynamics. It is claimed that humor is used here to balance the group norm of egalitarianism with the differential prestige that Robert is accorded as a result of his prolific publication record. Robert himself apparently does not wish to emphasize that which might put him above the others, since such behavior would violate the climate of equality and comraderie that normally infuses the group's communication. Accordingly, Robert responds to Peter's observation with self-disparaging humor that diffuses any differential status that might have accumulated as a result of the respect implied by the remark. Robert thus uses humor as a self-directed status-leveler in accord with the demands of the egalitarian norm. The other group members jump in after Robert's one-down
joke, and they elaborate on the theme he introduced using the same style of put-down humor that he initiated. The group becomes so involved in the laughter and the repartee in this episode that this researcher concludes that the status-leveling has been effective in allowing the group to enact egalitarianism and participative comraderie.

A somewhat different power situation infuses the third sequence to be discussed. In the following exchange, the faculty members attempt to temporarily suspend the norm which dictates that graduate students, being on the lowest rung of the hierarchical ladder in faculty meetings, should be “seen but not heard”. The struggle involved in attempting to encourage the graduate students to participate in a status-leveling, egalitarian manner, when their hierarchical position dictates a respectful silence, can be seen in the episode that follows.

The sequence takes place during a discussion of the desirability of making faculty evaluations accessible to undergraduate communication majors. On this subject, the graduate representatives at the meeting are the logical intermediaries between the faculty position and the student position, and thus they are called upon to enact a spokesperson role. The problem, however, seems to be that turning over the floor to the hierarchically lowest members of the faculty meeting is a violation of “the way things are done”, i.e., the established interactional patterns which dictate that graduate students should adopt a silent observer role in the meetings. The norm of
egalitarianism, which usually does not apply to graduates, is thus being temporarily stretched in order to include the graduate students, level the status differential, and diffuse the silencing power of hierarchy.

Peter: Do, uh the students have an opinion? Even though you're not undergraduate students?

Andrew: Well, could we help out by providing syllabi?

David: You're not a student!

Peter: Well, let's hear it.

Ruth: You're not a student, Andrew.

David: You're fac-you're faculty now.

Anne: Yeh, I think syllabi is a good idea.

Peter: You guys got an opinion?

Kevin: Yeh, I think syllabi would be good.

Charles: You're not a student anymore.

Kevin: No.

Student 1: Seems to be the consensus.

Anne: Yeh, um-

Robert: Those are unavailable.

Student 2: I agree. There's not really much in them, that that's - that is of relevance to anybody but the instructor. Um, however, when you do go back to them and say, we in the faculty meeting decided that you can't have them, or something like that -- (unintelligible).

Scott: Well, we're not going to say that. We're going to say "Lisa decided." (Laughter and garbled talk)
The communicative result of the norm-violation that Peter initiates is that the faculty members resist relinquishing the floor and answer for the graduate students, and the lowly graduate students, in turn, hesitate to take the floor and speak their opinion. The first graduate student resolves the conflict between hierarchy and temporary egalitarianism by responding with a neutral reflection of what he perceives to be the faculty's stance (i.e., "Seems to be the consensus").

The second graduate student takes more of a communicative risk in her response, but at first she still largely just mirrors back what the faculty members have expressed as their position on the matter. She then adds a new consideration, however, by questioning how the faculty will inform students of their decision to refuse access to the evaluations. By voicing her concerns, she asserts herself beyond her hierarchical position, and she thus sets herself up as the focus of a humor move that will remind her of her place in the power structure. This researcher claims that Peter's joking remark, "Well, we're not going to say that. We're going to say, 'Lisa decided,' " gains its humorous force in two ways: 1) it reaffirms the hierarchy by portraying the least powerful member as a scapegoat for the decisions of the more powerful members; and 2) it makes it clear that because of the graduate student's low status and norm of silence, she actually has no power to affect faculty decisions. Thus, Peter's remark can be seen as a humorous parody of the actual hierarchical configuration of faculty and graduate students, and the group recognizes it as such with uproarious
To summarize the claims made above, this sequence of interaction illustrates an attempt on the faculty's part to temporarily expand the norm of egalitarianism and increase the status level of the graduates through directly requesting that they violate their norm of silence. Allowing the norm to be broken is difficult for the group members, however, as can be seen by the faculty's reluctance to relinquish the floor, and the students' reflection of faculty opinion. Lastly, the tension generated by this challenge to social order is diffused through a humor move that implicitly represents the themes of power, status, and control that are at the heart of the hierarchical dynamics in the episode.

The fourth and final status-leveling sequence to be examined occurs when the faculty group is deciding who will be their representative in the professors' union. The Chair technically belongs to the administrative level in the University, and thus he might be viewed as one of "them" against which the union is organized. This appears not to be the case in the Communication faculty group, however. As will be seen in the following episode, the potential outsider status dictated by Robert's position in the University hierarchy is diffused, and egalitarianism is reinforced, through status-leveling humor.

Robert: Do you want to make a decision or not?

Ruth: Sure, why not?
Peter: Sure.
Ruth: Let’s get this out of the way.
Peter: This is simple. All in favor of Charles —
Ruth: (to Robert) You have to leave the room while we do this, right?
Pamela: Yeh.
Ruth: Technically.
Steve: That’s right, because you can’t be in on it.
Charles: Take off your glasses and close your eyes. (Laughter, garbled talk)
Steve: You’re not a member of the union.
Robert: If I go into the other room, I can listen on the tape recorder. (Laughter)
Scott: You can go into my office and hear it through the wall. (Laughter)
Ruth: Just put your - put your head down on your desk, Robert, and that’ll be fine. Okay. I nominate Charles.

In the above sequence, this researcher claims that the group successfully negotiates rules and redefines the requirements of hierarchy. Enacting this negotiation through humor serves to reinforce the norms of egalitarianism, informality, participation, and cohesiveness that are so central to the group’s culture. The key issue in the episode seems to be that though the Chair is technically of a higher status than the other group members, the status-leveling egalitarian communication style he usually
employs makes the group perceive him as "one of us", not "one of them". Hence, it is suggested that in order to reconcile the conflict between hierarchical regulations and an egalitarian climate, the group members parody the official procedure and reaffirm comraderie through shared laughter. The implication of the humorous remarks in this episode appears to be that openness and cohesiveness are central group values, ones that will not be sacrificed for compliance with hierarchical regulations. Thus, in this episode, status-leveling humor accomplishes the reconciliation of the contradiction between Robert's hierarchical "outsider" status and his membership in an egalitarian group culture.

To conclude, this chapter has examined how the power structure of the Communication Department is enacted through opening power negotiations, compliance-gaining attempts, and status-leveling interactions. It was suggested that, in the enactment of power, humor is used to balance the dialectical tensions that exist between hierarchy and egalitarianism, leadership and participative decision-making, structure and flexibility, and status and informality. Each component of the above mentioned polarities represents an important facet of the group culture, and we have seen that humorous communication is a strategy that is well-suited to the culture and to managing the tensions inherent in its dualities.
CHAPTER 5
ENACTMENT OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

Chapter 4 examined the ways in which certain aspects of the departmental power structure are enacted through the communication of faculty members. It was claimed that humor is used in the enactment of power to regulate the dialectical forces of hierarchy and egalitarianism. Chapter 5 will focus upon the second major claim, that humor functions to enact cultural identity within this group. It will delineate the ways in which humor is used in the enactment of culture to balance the dialectical forces of differentiation and integration. Humor will be broken down into two general functions in the forthcoming analysis: social control and community-building. These two functional categories will then be considered in light of their relationship to differentiation and integration.

A systems orientation shapes the conceptual schema that emerged from a study of the data and will be used to explicate the enactment of
cultural identity in this chapter. The pragmatic perspective is appropriate to this analysis because it emphasizes a synergistic approach to the interdependence of a system's parts. Taking this perspective, the identity of a cultural group like the Communication Department can be conceptualized by using a "team" metaphor. Each member of a team has both a sense of "what we are" as a group, and also a sense of "who I am" as an individual within the collectivity. Each individual's perceptions of group identity and personal identity are thus integral parts of team membership. The culture of a team can be thought of as the whole that is greater than and/or different from the sum of its individual parts. It must be emphasized, however, that each part is a vitally important link in an interdependent system without which the whole would not exist. Thus, a major assumption in this chapter is that a group's identity as a team is more than a collection of individual identities, and that the larger cultural identity is in turn dependent for its very existence upon the individuals who contribute to it.

To make the team metaphor more concrete, consider a basketball

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4The pragmatic perspective is the communicative adaptation of General Systems Theory. Fisher (1978) states, "The applications of systems theory to communication focus on individual behaviors that, through empirically observable patterns based on redundancy, serve to characterize the social system that is called communication" (p. 211). He continues, "Qualitative analysis of communication systems is clearly the principle research methodology used within the pragmatic perspective" (p. 218). According to Fisher, both systems theory and the pragmatic perspective posit that a human system is composed of interdependent parts, is different from the sum of its components, and has permeable boundaries that keep the system open to environmental influence. Communication is the social enactment of a system, and thus the analytical focus within this perspective is upon communicative behavior rather than upon internal feelings and intentions.
team. Each player on a basketball team must develop his or her skills to become a valuable contributor to team success. A conflict can occur, however, if a player becomes too self-oriented and begins to emphasize individual goals over group goals. When this occurs, a player tries to attain personal glory by becoming the star of the team, even though this “star behavior” may actually hinder the successful functioning of the team as a whole. What happens in this hypothetical case is that the player differentiates him or herself from the other players, emphasizes independence over interdependence, and comes to adopt a competitive rather than a cooperative stance towards all fellow teammates. The end result is that the culture is impoverished by an imbalance between individuality and collectivity, and the contradiction between differentiation and integration is enacted in a way that is destructive to the system as a whole.

The team metaphor, as sketched above, suggests that a group's culture can emerge from the fundamental tension that exists between individuality and collectivity. In addition, the ways in which a group manages these dialectical forces of differentiation and integration can, in a large part, determine the long term viability of the cultural ensemble. If the balance tips too much towards differentiation, the collectivity may disintegrate into a hodge-podge of individuality; on the other hand, if the system becomes unbalanced towards integration, interdependence may become complete dependence, and an incestuous, inbred culture would result. Thus, one major claim that will be made in this analysis is that the identity of a
culture can, in part, grow out of the strategies a group uses to manage the integration and differentiation that appear to be natural products of individuals uniting into a collectivity.

The balance between differentiation and integration can be thought of as dynamic interdependence. When a culture's members interact with a fluid, evolving interdependence, the tensions between the dialectical contradictions of dependence and independence, cooperation and competition, and group goals and individual goals, can be managed in ways that are creative and appropriate for the particular culture. It is here that humor enters the conceptual arena, because the second claim being made is that humor can be an effective communicative mechanism for regulating interdependence and balancing the contradiction between differentiation and integration.

After an in-depth study of the data, this researcher also claims that humor serves two basic functions in the enactment of the Communication Department's cultural identity: 1) the forces of integration appear to be managed through the community-building aspects of humor; and 2) the tendencies towards differentiation are apparently regulated by using humor for social control purposes. It is posited that the community-building function can be seen when humor is used to reinforce cohesiveness, morale, comraderie, and norm-following behavior, and that the social control function is in operation when humor serves to manage tension, aggression, conflict, and
norm-violating behavior.

The ideas presented above are the key conceptual components that will be used to analyze the Communication faculty's enactment of cultural identity. The claims that compose this conceptual framework emerged out of a qualitative study of communicative data, and thus they are grounded in the actual interaction of the cultural members themselves. Since the claims form a somewhat complex conceptual configuration, however, they are represented diagramatically below to enhance the clarity of the forthcoming discussion.

### Enactment of Cultural Identity

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differentiation</th>
<th>Integration</th>
<th>Interdependence</th>
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<td>competition</td>
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<td>individuality</td>
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<td>personal goals</td>
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<td>independence</td>
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### Humor

#### Social Control Function

manages: tension
aggression
conflict
norm-violation
types: hostile joking
insider put-downs
sarcasm
parody

#### Community-Building Function

reinforces: cohesiveness
comraderie
morale
norm-fulfillment
types: harmless wit
self-directed joking
outsider put-downs
friendly repartee
stories
fantasy chains
The following analysis will thus explore the ways in which the dual functions of humor can facilitate the enactment of cultural identity. In actual communication, the social control and community-building aspects of humor are often intertwined in a complex way (e.g., as suggested in the literature review, joking relationships are frequently characterized by a combination of friendliness and competition, and comraderie and antagonism). For the clarity of the discussion, however, the two functions of humor will be analyzed separately. The first section will address the claim that the Communication faculty uses humor to manage differentiation and enact social control. The second section will examine the claim that humor is employed in reinforcing integration and building community. Together, the two sections will indicate how the group members use humor to regulate interdependence and balance the dialectical tension between differentiation and integration. It will thus become clear that humor is indeed a vital element in the faculty's communicative enactment of their Departmental culture.

Social Control

As was suggested earlier, this researcher claims that social control is enacted when humor is used to dispel tension or anxiety, provide an outlet for aggression, penalize norm-violation, manage conflict, put an individual in his/her "place", regulate competition, or curb excessive assertions of independence and individuality. The Communication faculty members most frequently accomplish the above-mentioned results through some form of
hostile joking, e.g., sarcasm, parody, or put-down humor. The episodes discussed in this section will therefore illustrate specifically how humor operates as a form of social control in the interaction of Communication Department faculty.

The following brief episode takes place in the context of a discussion about the kinds of information that can be submitted to a University newsletter and how that information gets approved.

Ruth: So you can put in anything you want, and nobody checks its accuracy? (Laughter)

Robert: Well, yes, that's the - that's the situation.

Michelle: Ruth was just given the Nobel prize...(Laughter)

Scott: We can really start smearing each other! (Laughter)

Ruth: Yeh, really. (Laughter)

This sequence illustrates the claim that humor can be used to express both integration and differentiation. The theme of putting anything the faculty wants into the newsletter takes two directions. Michelle uses humor to depict a fantasy which praises and supports a group member, and thus her dishonest submission to the newsletter would enhance the prestige of the collectivity in an integrative way by aggrandizing one of its individuals.

Peter's humor, on the other hand, achieves its force by articulating the tension that exists between cooperation and competition. He jokingly tips
the balance of interdependence towards personal self-interest in acknowledging that, underneath the norms of loyalty and comraderie, there may exist the desire to compete and excel as individuals. Peter's humor provides an outlet for the forces of differentiation, and the group's responsive laughter indicates a recognition of his competitive theme; thus, this episode suggests that joking behavior can be used to safely express differentiating tendencies that would violate integrative norms if they were expressed without the guise of humor.

The next episode provides an illustration of how humor is used as a social control mechanism to enforce group norms and penalize norm-violating behavior. In this episode, Ruth is leading the group in a vote that will determine whether or not her husband Charles is elected to be the union representative for the Communication Department.

Ruth: Okay, I nominate Dr. ___.

Pamela: I second it.

Ruth: All in favor?

Peter: Is that Charles?

All: Aye.

Ruth: All opposed? The motion is carried.

Andrew: Going to ask for abstentions? (Laughter)

Ruth: I don't know Robert's Rules of Order very well.

Michelle: Discussion?

Peter: Apparently just enough to ramrod your old man through! (Laughter)
The force of Peter's humor in this episode comes from invoking a shared knowledge of the taboo against the formation of coalitions. Coalitions are taboo since they disrupt integration and emphasize individual over group goals. The fact that Ruth and Charles are married makes them more susceptible to being perceived as a coalition, thus they usually operate as completely separate professionals within the Department. In this episode, however, when Ruth nominates Charles and leads the vote, she sets herself up to be the target of humor that aims to regulate her behavior in accordance with group norms. What Peter's humor accomplishes, then, is that it explicitly condemns any differentiating inclination that Ruth might have towards uniting into coalition with her husband, and thereby disturbing the integration of the culture.

Humor serves a similar social control function in the following interaction, where Charles is penalized for failing to attend a meeting.

**Robert:** Okay. Moving right along, I also want to thank you for attending our majors meeting on uh Tuesday.

**David:** Yeh. Thanks a lot, Charles. (Laughter)

**Steve:** I have another—

**Robert:** We had a good, uh, a pretty good turnout.

**Peter:** Wasn’t Charles there?

**David:** No.

**Robert:** (Unintelligible) gets extra credit.

**Andrew:** Extra—cookies. (Laughter)
Scott: Course reductions. (Laughter)

Here Charles' individual irresponsibility has the potential to adversely affect the accomplishment of group goals, hence the humor of the other faculty members punishes him for his norm-violating behavior. In addition, the benefits of fulfilling the group's expectations are jokingly portrayed with the effect that desirable behavior when the next such meeting occurs is supported. Humor thus functions in this sequence to call attention to and discourage Charles' differentiating behavior of shirking his responsibilities as a member of the group; it also accomplishes an encouragement of more integrative behavior in the future.

In the next example, when Peter violates the norm which dictates that individuals should not leave before a faculty meeting is over, the group members respond with hostile joking that functions as a form of social control.

Peter: 'Bye.
Andrew: 'Bye.
Ruth: We won't miss you. (Laughter)
David: 'Bye, Peter.
Peter: I know. That's why I'm not concerned. (Laughter)
Michelle: Peter, thanks for dropping in!

In this episode, Ruth enacts social control and points out the norm
violation by using put-down humor. Peter, however, responds with a one-up comeback that diffuses the power of the negative sanction. Through his comment, he portrays himself as an individual who is outside the collectivity and is therefore immune to pressures towards integration and compliance with cultural norms. Michelle does not accept Peter's humorous assertion of differentiation, though; instead she fires back a facetious remark which reinforces the fact that a norm is being violated. The humor in this episode thus functions to discourage Peter's tendencies towards differentiating himself from the group through norm-violating behavior.

In a similar vein, the following sequence illustrates humor being used to penalize Kevin for his lateness. Since his behavior violates the norm of arriving at faulty meetings on time, Kevin has to bear the consequences of being conspicuous and being used as the focus for group laughter in this episode.

(Kevin enters)

Michelle: Speaking of retreats... (Laughter)
Ruth: Very snazzy again.
Peter: Nice of you to stop in. (Laughter)
Kevin: I had a meeting before this one.
Michelle: How is Bubbles? (Laughter)
Ruth: Now you have to admit, that was cute!

What humor accomplishes in the above episode is a parody of Kevin that diffuses the validity of the excuse he offers for his norm violation. Thus, it is
indicated through joking that one’s justifications are not as important to the group as is behavior that follows cultural rules.

In the episodes discussed so far, the following claims about the social control function of humor have been made. Humor can be used: to safely express competitive tendencies without directly violating integrative norms; to discourage differentiating inclinations towards coalition-building; to penalize norm violations; to encourage future integrative and norm-fulfilling behavior; and to diffuse excuses that have the potential for getting someone “off the hook” for a norm violation. All of these claims are based upon observations of the ways in which the group uses humor to manage violations of cultural standards for behavior.

The next sequence illustrates that humor can also be employed as a negative sanction against norm-violating language. In the sequence below, Peter becomes the focus of social control humor because he uses vocabulary that has racist overtones, and racist or sexist language is generally considered to be inappropriate to the group’s communicative style.

Robert: ...The minority students have a fairly good shot if they’re qualified of minority scholarships or fellowships, which are quite outside those that we - we have in the department.

Peter: Do we have Negroes in the department now? (Laughter)

Michelle: They’re black, Peter; they’re black. Not Negroes! Jesus, (unintelligible). (Laughter)

Peter: Oh. Oh, excuse me. (Laughter)
Ruth: We have one black graduate student.
Scott: Took him twenty years to make him say “Negro”! (Laughter)
Robert: Yes, we have Gay-Gayle that we admitted uh last year. You probably don’t —
David: She counts twice. (Laughter)
Robert: That was the —
Ruth: Black and a woman.
Robert: Yeh, in fact we discussed her...
Michelle: Is she gay, too? (Laughter) You have a hell of a quota going here.
Robert: Uh we discussed her at a faculty meeting before you were under medication, Peter. (Laughter) You don’t seem to uh —
Peter: There doesn’t seem to be much of a difference. (Laughter)

In this episode, Peter’s use of the word “Negro” sparks a sequence of put-down humor that serves to indicate to Peter that his language is not appropriate to the cultural identity of the group. Peter acknowledges his violation, makes an apparently semi-facetious apology, and concludes the episode with one-down, self-directed humor that makes retribution for his transgression. What is accomplished by the humor in this episode is that Peter is castigated for his word choice, then the joking theme is elaborated in such a way that integration is reinforced through shared laughter.

In the sequence that follows, the norm violation also has to do with
language, but it is sexist instead of racist vocabulary that sparks the enactment of humor as a social control strategy.

**Robert:** ...We should have that person come in after we give that person the way we are thinking about doing the research component, so that he can analyze it and then come in and talk with us and make some recommendations.

**Ruth:** He or she.

**Robert:** I was using it in the correct grammatical sense.

**Ruth:** That’s no longer acceptable. (Laughter)

**Michelle:** All right!

**Ruth:** Times change; you might as well change with them, Dr. __. (Laughter)

**Michelle:** Say “they”.

**Robert:** Did you show her that letter that you got from NOW, Peter? (Laughter)

**Peter:** Yeh.

**Scott:** You have to say: "S", slash, "H", "E". (Laughter)

**Peter:** I should; I will. I’ll show it to her. She’d appreciate that.

**Robert:** Peter got a letter from NOW, wanting - wanting a male - a male intern. (Laughter)

**Peter:** Although –

**Robert:** That’s discrimination.

**Peter:** --they don’t discriminate, they said. They went through two paragraphs of why they don’t discriminate and then described their discrimination. (Laughter)

**Ruth:** And then they want a male intern.
Peter: Yeh, it was great, it really was. (Laughter)

Charles: That's good.

David: Do they basically want a hunk? (Laughter)

In the above episode, Ruth enacts social control through humor to shape Robert's language use. When Robert defends himself, Ruth rejects the justification he offers. At this point, Robert switches to a related topic, the feminist organization NOW, as a way of indirectly parodying Ruth by putting down NOW. Ruth, however, does not rise to the bait or defend NOW as though it is in any way related to her. She also does not acknowledge that the male members of the culture may be attempting to enact humorous social control over her and put her in her "place" by making feminist women appear ridiculous and contradictory. Thus, in this episode, humor is being used by two different "camps" to accomplish two different types of social control: Ruth jokingly curtails Robert's sexist language use, and the male group members in turn diffuse the force of Ruth's feminist opinions through humorous parody.

The claim that has been made in the two previous sequences is that humor can be used by group members to enact social control over language use. In these two instances, group members employ humor to correct vocabulary that is apparently perceived to be racist or sexist. One explanation for such corrective humor is that racist or sexist language may function to differentiate the user from the liberal ideology of the culture as a
whole. We have also seen, however, that humor can be used to diffuse attempts to influence word choice when other group members do not share the perspective that prompts the social control effort in the first place.

In the next episode to be examined, humor functions to manage misunderstanding and upbraid the people who are responsible for a communicative mix-up. The group uses hostile joking, i.e., sarcasm and put-downs, to pinpoint an appropriate target for blame. The subjects of misunderstanding are two upcoming conventions: SCA and ICA.

**Robert:** Who's planning to go to SCA? Okay, we've got Scott, Steve, Ruth, David.

**David:** No. No, not SCA. ICA.

**Robert:** Uh no, SCA's coming up.

**David:** Right. (Laughter)

**Robert:** You raised your hand —

**Ruth:** He thought - he thought you were saying ICA. It was a misunderstanding. Sometimes that occurs in communication. (Laughter)

**Scott:** You weren't enunciating clearly!

**David:** Yes, because that was what your previous sentence referred to, and then I heard you say, “Who's going to”, and then I heard you say SCA, and I grabbed my hand back. (Laughter)

**Michelle:** Dull. Dull. (Laughter)

**Robert:** Okay. Are you submitting a paper to ICA?

**David:** No. I'm - well, I have something coming out in the yearbook, y'know, so you go up to bask in the glory of (unintelligible).
Not a paper.

Michelle: A simple yes or no will do. (Laughter)

In this sequence, the group's normally smooth flow of communication is disturbed by a misunderstanding. This misunderstanding disrupts the integration and cooperative spirit of the group, and as a result, the group members become temporarily differentiated as individuals arguing humorously about who is to blame for the disruption. Ruth and Peter defend David and blame Robert by using humor as a social control strategy. Michelle, however, apparently holds David responsible and uses humor to penalize him for what she portrays as his inept communication. What humor accomplishes in this episode, then, is that it acts as a strategy for processing and clarifying the misunderstanding that temporarily splits the group into disjunctive factions. The use of humor thus allows the group to clear up the confusion in a way that diffuses tension and minimizes the possibility of escalation into conflict through shared laughter.

The next segment of discourse also involves a disruption of efficient communication, but unlike in the sequence above, the disturbance in this episode may be a strategy to undermine consensus and resist complying with what the group members apparently perceive to be a bothersome obligation. Before the sequence reproduced below, Robert suggests that the faculty should get together for lunch with a consultant to discuss the adequacy of departmental teaching evaluation forms.
Robert: ...Would you all be interested in a brown bag lunch? He's very-

Ruth: What day?

Robert: — into this. Well.

Ruth: What day of the week (unintelligible). Is it a Tuesday or Thursday, or a Monday, Wednesday, Friday?

Robert: As you wish.

Pamela: No Monday.

Anne: How about Saturday or Sunday? (Laughter)

Scott: No Tuesday or Thursday.

Michelle: No Wednesday.

Pamela: Anybody for Wednesday? (Laughter)

Robert: No Friday.

Andrew: No Monday, Wednesday, or Friday. (Laughter)

Ruth: I guess there goes that idea!

Scott: How about a cocktail party? (Laughter)

Robert: At Marty's place. (Laughter)

Peter: How about eight o'clock? Nobody's got eight o'clock. (Laughter)

Ruth: Oh, Peter. Isn't he cute? (Laughter)

Robert: I'll be here.

Peter: I know. So will I.

Charles: I've got therapy at eight o'clock. (Laughter)

Peter: I'd like to do it - I'd like to do it to these guys one time.
Get them here at eight o'clock.

Anne: I don’t believe you get here at eight.

Pamela: He does.

Ruth: Oh, yes, he does.

David: How - how would anybody - how would any of us know whether he does or not?

Michelle: He’s an insomniac.

Ruth: He beats Mary.

Michelle: He beats Mary? He beats Mary! (Laughter)

Peter: And now Andrew beats me.

Pamela: He lives here. He doesn’t leave.

Charles: Andrew’s got no other place to change his clothes. (Laughter)

Robert: Andrew comes in so early that Mary’s been complaining that the coffee is strong! (Laughter)

The above sequence is rich with examples of the social control function of humor. While the group members are ostensibly trying to negotiate a time when they can all meet as Robert suggests, they communicatively sabotage the decision-making process by violating the norm of consensus that governs most of their decisional processes. Thus, one possible explanation for this episode is that though the official group goal may be to arrange a meeting time, the informal goal of the faculty members may well be to make agreement impossible; if this informal goal is realized, the group members will successfully avoid having to commit time to what
appears to be an unpopular activity.

The focus of the humor in this episode shifts when Peter suggests an eight o'clock meeting. The group is easily sidetracked into the early morning joking theme that infuses the second half of the sequence and further detracts from the decision-making process. The morning theme, however, differentiates what had been an integrated faculty group into polarized individuals. The group thus splits into “us” and “them” factions, based on what morning habits each member considers to be “normal”, (e.g., David asks, “How would any of us know...”). The humor is created by the late-risers parading and exaggerating the behavior of the early-birds. It thus has the effect of portraying the early morning minority as violating the majority norm of assuming a more leisurely approach to beginning the day.

In this episode, then, humor functions as a means of undermining consensus and releasing the tension that is generated by the group’s resistance to the decision-making process. (Their enactment of resistance is, in fact, successful: the subject is eventually dropped without group consensus having been achieved, and the decision is deferred until Winter Session). Humor also functions in this same episode to enact social control by differentiating individuals according to their habits, defining the norm by majority rule, and parodying the minority individuals for differing from the norm. Thus, from the last two sequences, it is claimed that humor can be used both to process differentiation and conversational confusion, and also to
activate them when it meets the needs and goals of the members of the group.

In the analysis of discourse in this section, then, several claims have been made and supported by actual episodes of naturally occurring humorous communication. These claims concerning the social control function of humor will be summarized below before moving on to the forthcoming section.

From an examination of the data, it appears evident that humor, as a social control strategy, is enacted through hostile joking, put-down, sarcasm, and parody, and it is often used by the Communication faculty to regulate the interdependence among group members. Humor is able to fulfill this function because it can balance the individualistic, competitive tendencies that lead a group towards differentiation. Humor can also accomplish the enforcement of behavioral and communicative compliance with group norms because negative sanctions can be delivered humorously when norms are violated. In addition, we have seen from these episodes that humor can be used as a social control strategy both to process misunderstandings and thereby manage differentiation, and also to enact resistance and undermine consensus, thereby cultivating differentiation. Lastly, it was claimed that humor can function as a means of differentiating the group into “us” and “them” factions, where the majority defines the norm and exerts social control by parodying the minority behavior.
There are other instances in the data in which humor is used as a means of social control to: undermine group members' objections and resistance to achieving consensus; manage the tensions that stem from competing about workloads; resist complying with regulations; negotiate incompatible opinions or interests; relieve anxiety about sensitive issues; and dispel the animosity that stems from disagreements.

In sum, it can be concluded that differentiation is the necessary complement to integration, just as individuality is necessary to the collectivity of a team. This section has illustrated that humor can be used as an effective social control strategy for managing the forces of differentiation that are an inevitable component of a group’s cultural identity.

**Community-Building**

In the last section, specific episodes were used to illustrate how humor can function as a social control mechanism to manage differentiation in the communicative enactment of cultural identity. In this section, humor that serves as a community-building function will be illustrated, and the ways in which it is used to reinforce integration and contribute to cultural identity will be examined.

As was mentioned earlier, the Communication faculty projects a cultural identity that is perceived by both the group and outsiders to be
characterized by traits such as informality, openness, approachability, and, perhaps above all, humorous communication. To return to the team metaphor, building a common perception of reality through humor is an effective strategy for encouraging differentiated individuals to unite into an integrated team and to substitute superordinate team goals for their own personal goals. The major claim in this section, then, is that the faculty's humor and shared laughter often reinforce cohesiveness, morale, comraderie, and norm-following behavior, and thus they build community and strengthen the identity of the team as an integrated culture.

The literature review in Chapter 1 suggested several basic types of humor that all appear to serve a community-building function in the interaction of the Communication faculty. A study of the data suggests the following claims: 1) harmless wit, such as joke telling, punning, and humorously referring to shared problems and experiences, reinforces comraderie by providing enjoyment and evoking laughter in which the whole group can participate at no one's expense; 2) self-directed humor is also used to build community when one group member offers him or herself to the group as the focus of shared laughter; 3) humor which is directed towards putting down outsiders reinforces cohesiveness by creating a sense of superiority, or an "us against them" response where the group comes together in defense against an outside threat; 4) friendly repartee builds comraderie by providing enjoyment for the audience members who support the duel of wits with their laughter; 5) in addition, humorous stories and culturally ingrained
inside jokes contribute to a sense of shared experience, thereby reinforcing the identity of the group as a unique culture.

The following additional claim will be made: 6) fantasy chains (Bormann, 1984) can also function as community-building humor if they are constructed by the group members in a joking way. Bormann postulates that fantasy chains are built when one person introduces a fantasy theme, and the other group members participatively elaborate upon that theme until it becomes a part of the group's social reality. Bormann (1984) describes this process:

When a fantasy chains through a group, the members discover in an exciting and emotional way a common ground relating to values, action, and attitudes. When a number of fantasies have chained out, the group develops a common culture of heroes, villians, saints, and sinners and the common scenarios in which these characters act out laudable and deplorable behaviors. The common set of dramatic characters and actions, attitudes, and values that they may symbolize becomes an important part of the group's social reality and its subculture. The members come to share a common symbolic world. (p.54)

The analysis in this section will support the claim that the Communication Department faculty uses all of the above forms of humor in slightly different ways to build community, reinforce integration, and enact the cultural identity of the group. It must be noted, however, that these humor types are frequently not clearly distinct from one another; in the faculty members' communication, for example, wit is often employed in repartee, repartee can be used as a way of chaining out a joking fantasy
theme, and self-directed humor can be the focus of a witty story.

Though these types of humor all serve a similar community-building function, just as sarcasm, parody, and put-downs all can enact social control, each fulfills its integrative function by operating in a unique manner. Therefore, the forthcoming analysis will be organized according to the claims that are being asserted about what wit, self-directed joking, outsider put-downs, friendly repartee, stories, and fantasy chains accomplish in the group's enactment of cultural identity. These claims have emerged from and are therefore grounded in the humorous conversational data itself.

The Enjoyment and Community-Reinforcing Functions of Harmless Wit

_Harmless wit_, as used by this researcher, refers to neutral humor which uses as its focus ideas, words, events, or generalities of human nature or experience. As Berlyne (1969) states:

In the case of “harmless” wit, there may be delight in illogicalities and absurdities simply because they represent a respite from suppressing irrelevant, frivolous, or illogical associations. (p. 803)

The harmless wit that emerges from the Communication faculty’s interactions appears most often to take the form of punning and humorously referring to shared experiences and problems. Wit also appears to be characterized by one-across messages which are not attempts to gain or relinquish relational control; instead, they aim at neutralizing or leveling control and establishing a
parallel joking relationship.

The two major claims to be made concerning harmless wit are that it can operate as a means of 1) providing enjoyment for the group members, and 2) reinforcing their commonality of perspective and experience. With regard to the former, it seems that one of the main reasons the faculty members value their humorous communication style is that it provides entertainment and thus makes their interactions with other individuals in the culture more pleasant. Interdependent relationships among group members have the potential to be fraught with conflicting goals and needs, and harmless wit functions as a strategy for managing these tensions and emphasizing the enjoyable, integrative side of group membership. Support for the assertion that wit functions to provide entertainment and therefore boost morale can be found in the Metacommunication section in this chapter; this later section illustrates the lowered morale and complaints about lack of enjoyment that ensue when the group's communication style becomes serious.

The second claim mentioned above is that harmless wit emphasizes the commonality of perspective and experience among group members. The decipherability of a witty remark is, to a large extent, predicated upon shared cultural understanding. This is illustrated by situations in which a person who is foreign to a culture is unable to appreciate the gist of a cultural joke or pun even though he or she may be fluent in the language being used. Since group members must rely on their cultural knowledge to decipher harmless
wit, then, it functions to reinforce the commonality of their perceptions and experiences, thereby emphasizing their shared cultural identity in an integrative way.

In the following two episodes, a sense of community is built by group members jokingly emphasizing their shared experience and their common understanding of "the way things should be". In the episode below, the subject under discussion is how Communication students should be required to bind their theses.

**Robert:** It's not like where we had to hustle around and have ours bound by...let's see...

**Peter:** Leather or leatherette. (Laughter)

**Robert:** We were (unintelligible).

**Charles:** Plastiquette. (Laughter)

**Robert:** It's Naugahyde. (Laughter)

**Pamela:** Naugahyde.

**Ruth:** I know.

**Steve:** Well, you can get a - I wonder if you can get a cheaper binding.

**Charles:** They do a nice job. The do a real nice job.

**Ruth:** You can - you can buy those pull-apart binders at the - at the library for three or four dollars.

**Pamela:** Yes, the cheapos. At the bookstore.

**Robert:** We don't want any of them...
...I think that's unacceptable. I've gotten a couple like that, and they keep falling apart. And see, the - the reason - I think - well, one of the main reasons for this, not only... not only does it make nice uh nice decoration in your office, (Laughter), it also, but the main reason is the fact that you have other graduate students coming in saying, "Hey, look, what - what is really required? What do they do here? What does it look like?" And it's very easy —

Charles: So it's better than a shoulder shrug, huh? (Laughter)

Steve: Yeh. (Laughter)

Robert: Or (gesture). (Laughter)

David: I just tell them to keep writing, and we'll tell you when to stop. (Laughter)

Steve: And so it's - it's very nice to be able to pull something off your shelf...

Charles: There must - the theses must look pretty meager next to all those dissertations you brought with you from Penn. (Laughter)

Steve: No, they're the same size. (Laughter)

In the above episode, it is claimed that harmless wit builds comraderie and morale through providing an opportunity for shared laughter and enjoyment. It reinforces a sense of integrated cultural identity for the group members because it is predicated upon their common experiences. The wit in the first part of the sequence emerges from the history that the group members all share of having had their own theses and dissertations bound. In the second part, the joking theme shifts to some of the issues, familiar to all, that are involved in being graduate student advisors. Thus, the wit in
this interaction builds community by drawing attention to the commonality of the group members' experience in an entertaining way. The second episode of harmless wit takes place during a discussion of graduate assistantships and fellowships.

**Steve:** We have um...but I said, unfortunately, women don't apply, or don't uh qualify as minority - for minority fellowships. She said, "Well, how about a black woman who speaks Spanish?" (Laughter)

**Robert:** Steve said, "How much money do you want?" (Laughter)

**Steve:** But she never applied.

**Charles:** You said, "Hey, baby, que pasa?" (Laughter)

**Robert:** Say what? (Laughter) Que pasa?

**Steve:** But she didn't apply.

This episode illustrates the use of harmless wit to indicate a shared understanding of "the way things are" in the University system, i.e., the group members are all aware of pressures to recruit minorities and fulfill affirmative action requirements. The witty chaining out of the joking theme thus serves to unite the group members in laughter that reaffirms their common cultural perspective and appears to provide enjoyment in the process. The previous two sequences, then, demonstrate how harmless wit can function in the faculty's communication to build community, comraderie, and morale, by providing entertainment and emphasizing commonality. It is thus asserted that, in the Communication faculty group, wit can be used to accomplish the enactment of cultural identity in a system-integrative manner.
The Synergistic Functions of Self-directed Humor

*Self-directed humor* is the name given by this researcher to humor in which initiators use either themselves or the group as a whole as the focus of joking. This type of humor is characterized, in the faculty’s communication, by individuals engaging in self-deprecation or offering themselves as the butt of shared laughter. The messages used in such joking are usually one-down with an emphasis upon humility, ingratiating, or appeasement. There are instances in the data in which self-directed joking is used as a complimentary response to the one-up messages of another, a symmetrical, relinquishing response to the one-down messages of another, or merely a means of initiating a new topic of humor.

The claim that will be made concerning self-directed humor is that, like wit, it can encourage integration by building comraderie and providing an enjoyable experience of participative laughter. Though wit serves similar community-building functions, self-directed humor accomplishes these functions in a somewhat different manner. When individuals offer themselves or the group as a focus for humor, the group’s common perceptions of itself as a culture and each individual’s place within that culture are affirmed. Thus, it is claimed that a reinforcement of the group members’ synergistic understanding can be accomplished through self-directed humor. In addition, when a team can openly laugh at itself or its members, it is indicating that its needs for defensiveness and taking itself very seriously are low, and these
traits appear to be two of the key prerequisites in this faculty group for a cohesive and integrated culture. Thus, the following two episodes will illustrate the ways in which self-directed humor, with an individual or a group focus, can reinforce cohesiveness, comraderie, and the group members' synergistic perceptions of the relationship between the system's interdependent parts and the identity of the culture as a whole.

In the first episode of self-directed humor, Steve offers himself as the butt of group laughter. The other group members accept his invitation, and they respond with a witty put-down sequence that appears to provide enjoyment for all. The subject being discussed is whether or not the University has on file pictures of each faculty member that can be used to illustrate newsletter articles.

**Steve:** Do you have - do you have a University picture?

**Charles:** They do, but they - they don't, y'know send the stuff over...

**Peter:** There's a University picture? They have somebody paint, you know, come and do you for the newsletter. (Laughter)

**Robert:** It's my thought that they put in -

**Peter:** In oils. (Laughter)

**Robert:** -the pictures of people who are good-looking. (Laughter)

**Steve:** The last picture they put in of me was the one they brought down from Penn State. (Laughter)

**Ruth:** Oh, I saw that picture! (Laughter)

**David:** Was that the one that shows you on the bearskin rug? (Laughter)
Michelle: I’ve seen some ugly pictures in my day, but geez! (Laughter)
Robert: The wet look wasn’t that bad. (Laughter)
Steve: Greasy kid stuff works well. (Laughter)

Steve’s self-directed humor is, in this episode, injected into a stream of repartee. It stimulates a shift in the focus of the joking, and the ensuing put-down humor brings the group members together in shared laughter and in a cooperative effort to sustain the repartee through witty one-liners. The focus of joking is able to participate undefensively since he offered himself as the butt through self-directed humor, and the group reaffirms its common perception of an individual’s place within the group by elaborating on the self-disparaging theme that Steve offers. Thus, in this episode, we can see that self-directed humor with an individual focus bolsters the collectivity of the team by emphasizing the group’s understanding of one of its interdependent parts. The result is that the integrative, community-building tendencies in the group’s synergistic cultural identity are reinforced through humor.

In the second example, a slightly different type of self-directed humor is evinced. The faculty are discussing potential graduate students who want to audit Communication courses, before actually beginning the program, to familiarize themselves with the discipline.

Steve: The situation that arose was the - was this. I think there are three actually, in actuality, that, uh, either had been out of school for some time and - or uh one is in biology, one is in
graphic design, uh I forget what the other was in, and they said, y'know, how — “We’ve got to come to grips with what communication is all about before we get into the graduate level,” and they also wanted TA’s, wanted to become TA’s, and I said, “Well, that — that uh...”

Robert: You tell them as soon as the faculty comes to grips with it (Laughter), we'll let you know...we'll let you all know. (Laughter)

Steve: So I've - I've -

Anne: It's not open knowledge. (Laughter)

In this episode, the focus of the self-directed humor is the group as a whole. The humor serves the community-building function of acknowledging that consensus is difficult in a department that is young and a discipline that is made up of widely differing perspectives. Using this problem of differentiation as a joking theme enables the group to laugh together at themselves in an integrative way. Thus, it is claimed that through their shared laughter, stimulated by self-directed joking, the group members indicate that they collectively accept the forces of differentiation as a necessary facet of their interdependence and their cultural identity, one that can be balanced and managed through humor.
The Solidarity-Reinforcing Functions of Outsider Put-down Humor

*Outsider put-down humor* is the label that this researcher is affixing to satire, sarcasm, parody, and joking insults that use as their focus the faults or foibles of people who do not belong to the cultural ensemble. A study of the data suggests that whether put-downs serve an offensive or defensive function in a particular instance, they usually accomplish the same result: they draw the group members together in an “us against them” stance.

Therefore, the major claim that will be made in this section is that outsider put-downs reinforce solidarity and encourage the group to coalesce in defense against an outside threat. It will also be suggested that this type of humor can cultivate a sense of insider superiority in the group, reaffirm the culture’s position in the larger university hierarchy, and provide an outlet for fantasizing in a way that is aggrandizing and integrative for the group’s cultural identity.

The next three segments of conversation illustrate the ways in which the faculty uses outsider put-down humor to build community. In the first example, the faculty are discussing which departmental courses should have prerequisites.

**Pamela:** Can’t you say, “prereq. of instructor?”
Andrew: Can you state a course number or equivalent?

Charles: Well, see we - Robert and I talked about it, and - and equivalent and permission of the instructor are, uh, are - are sign posts for, uh, y'know, fat city. I mean, it's just...

Robert: That's like not...

Ruth: Well, then he'll get a lot of people in there, but once - once he gets them in there, then he can say, "What have you had - what have you had?", and he's got, um, a chance there to kick them out, if they haven't had anything.

David: Yeh, that's how I went from twenty to six. (Laughter)

Ruth: David's been real good at that. (Laughter)

Charles: I don't have any qualms at all about any-any of that. I would like to have "permission of instructor" on all our courses - (Laughter)

Peter: You bastard. (Laughter)

Charles: -but it's just - that's tantamount to saying, uh -

Ruth: Course by invitation only! (Laughter)

Robert: To saying forget about it. (Laughter)

In the above interaction, the faculty uses humor to create a sense of "us against the students", and they jokingly play with the fantasy of exercising their power over the students in an elitist way. This outsider put-down humor appears to bring the group members together into a cohesive community by reinforcing their sense of insider superiority. Throughout all the faculty meetings studied, outsider put-down humor is consistently aimed at either university administration or students. Thus, those above and below
the group in the University hierarchy are often used as the focus of faculty humor to accomplish solidarity and a strong sense of cultural identity. The next sequence unites both administration and students in one parody.

Robert: And we've got a real thick file in here...

Peter: For applicants?

Robert: Yeh.

Unknown: Bummer! (Laughter)

Robert: It's going to be another busy January —

Scott: Doing too good of a job then. (Laughter)

Robert: — sorting out applications.

Ruth: Oh, that's fun, though.

Peter: Yeh, it is.

Charles: The aftermath isn't much fun, is it, Robert?

Ruth: The calls from parents...

Robert: Parents call, parents call the president, parents call the dean.

Michelle: Parents call the (unintelligible).

Peter: Kids call the dean. (Laughter)

Robert: Dean calls the kids. (Laughter)

Anne: Oh no, you can rest assured, that will never happen! (Laughter)

This sequence shows the faculty portraying a situation of being harassed by outsiders: students, parents, and administrators. The picture
they create becomes transposed into the joking realm by repetition. The resulting parody builds solidarity by reinforcing the group's cohesiveness against the outsiders. The outsider put-downs also reaffirm a shared understanding of the group's position in the university hierarchy and the hassles that frequently buffet the culture from the outside.

The last episode of outsider put-down humor functions to integrate the group in much the same way. The background of the conversation is that the Communication undergraduate organization has requested access to the faculty's teaching evaluations to facilitate peer advisement. The faculty have discussed the issues involved, and have expressed their reservations. The episode begins when a covert motivation in the student leader comes to light.

Peter: Before we decide, before we decide, couldn't you just ask Joy to come in here next time around, and have her tell us what the plans are?

Elaine: Yeh, see, that - that's what my thing is. Why do they want them?

Ruth: I can - I think I might be able to shed a little - a little insight. I've talked with Joy about her motivation for um...

Anne: Umm-hmm.

Ruth: - organizing this. Uh, Joy got involved in the whole project because she was upset about taking a course which was, uh, she felt a lot harder graded much more difficulty than it should have been for that level and wants to be able to steer students away from those type of courses.

Anne: Umm-hmm.
Peter: Shit.

Kevin: Who was that, Peter? (Laughter)

Robert: Which one of Peter's courses was that? (Laughter)

Michelle: Who do you think? (Laughter)

Ruth: I think it was Peter. She was pissed off about the grade she got in Peter's course, and that's why she's organizing all of that. And I think that helps explain her motivation for wanting teaching evaluations —

Peter: It sure does.

Unknown: Yes.

Ruth: —which I don't think is a valid motivation.

Anne: Umm-hmm.

Ruth: I don't think that should be a part of the guidance process.

Robert: Well, I think I can explain to her your - your beliefs, uh, in a manner that it won't reflect that, uh, that there are any - any reasons other than the (unintelligible) one.

Charles: Just tell her, Peter said, "Go to hell!" (Laughter) "Go to hell, the D stays." (Laughter)

Ruth: Hey, it was only a B! (Laughter)

Charles: Oh, it was a B! Oh, I'm sorry; oh, I'm sorry. (Laughter)

Ruth: She wanted an A.

Peter: Or don't-don't bother to tell her for me. You could send her right in. (Laughter)

In the above episode, the group rallies together around Peter in defense against an outside threat. The group members instantly recognize
that Peter is the instructor in question because they all share the culturally ingrained knowledge that Peter is extraordinarily demanding in his grading practices. This shared recognition, greeted with laughter, appears to further reinforce cohesiveness because it emphasizes the group members' common perceptions of one member's role in their culture.

After Ruth illuminates the nefarious motivations of the student, the group members unite even more firmly in solidarity with Peter against the outsider. Charles articulates the group sentiment by voicing a hostile put-down of the student, then Ruth and Charles continue in their defensive posture, elaborating the parody of the student and making her concerns appear unjustified and ridiculous. After being supported by an integrated and cohesive group, Peter ends the sequence by jokingly demanding a confrontation with the outsider; the communication thus far indicates that his group would resolutely support him if such a showdown were to occur. In this sequence, humor is used defensively by the group members to criticize a threatening outsider and fantasize about how they would like to deal with the situation. It is claimed that the perception of “us against them” that is created by the outsider put-down humor, then, accomplishes the reinforcement of community, solidarity, and an integrated cultural identity.
The Integrative Competition Functions of Friendly Repartee

*Friendly repartee* is the name this researcher will give to a competitive type of humor which has an underlying base of enjoyment and positive regard of the participants towards each other. This kind of humorous interaction involves both participants playing to an audience in a duel of wits. The jokesters have a license to joke with one another, and the rules of interaction (the joking frame) are well established. Repartee, when used by the Communication faculty, is characterized by an escalating symmetry where each party uses humorous one-up messages to "out-wit" the others. The focus of joking may be a group member or an event, idea, or play on words.

The major claim that will be made concerning repartee is that it functions as an integrative way of enacting competitive tendencies that could potentially lead to differentiation if such a community-building outlet did not exist. Competitiveness appears to be a natural outgrowth of individuals, who have their own personal goals, uniting into a collectivity to accomplish group goals; i.e., though perhaps more covert, the competition between team members can often be just as tangible as intergroup competition. The Communication faculty, it is claimed, uses repartee as a vehicle for expressing and exercising these competitive forces in a system-integrative manner. The duel of wits that characterizes friendly repartee also appears to provide audience enjoyment, and since the humorous remarks are frequently based upon culturally ingrained themes, it can accomplish the reinforcement of
experiential commonality and cultural identity as well.

The next three episodes to be examined are examples of the friendly repartee and witty one-upsmanship that characterize so much of the faculty members' interactions with each other. The first sequence begins with Peter making a sarcastic response to Robert's warning that the faculty is not permitted to sell xeroxed articles to students. (Note: "Emma" is the mannequin Peter keeps in his office.)

**Robert:** But you need to be very careful. That's why we can't do that. And it's really easy to do other - other places.

**Peter:** You will be what? Uh, drawn and quartered? Fired, uh, locked up? (Laughter)

**Michelle:** They just take your first male born. No big deal. (Laughter)

**David:** He gets charged with fraud.

**Robert:** Locked up. You won't be able to change your clothes in your office. (Laughter)

**Michelle:** They'll steal Emma. (Laughter)

**Robert:** We also have an anti-mannequin rule. (Laughter)

**Scott:** Well, in his case, they'd make him the AAUP representative. (Laughter)

**Robert:** And so, get all the mannequins out of your office.

**Charles:** Fate worse than death. Right. (Laughter)

In this episode, Peter uses humorous exaggeration to diffuse the force of Robert's warnings and enact resistance to University regulations. Michelle
and David elaborate on the theme Peter introduces, then Robert adds an ingrained joke based on the group members' shared knowledge of Peter's rather peculiar office habits. The audience responds uproariously to this sequence of friendly repartee, and five group members become involved in the one-upsmanship of wits by adding their own rapid-fire one-liners. Peter's humorous remark is an ingrained reference to previous joking sequences about the professors' union. The repartee in this sequence is based on the group members' inside knowledge of their own culture; it therefore reaffirms the cohesiveness and cultural identity of the group, while providing an outlet for competition, in a way that is integrative and appears to provide enjoyment for all.

The following repartee interaction stems out of the faculty's discussion concerning what type of person they are looking for to fill a departmental vacancy, and hence, how the job description should be worded.

**David:** Yeh, maybe we want somebody who really has more of a communication orientation, or maybe a more corporate orientation, than somebody who just knows how to talk to uh newspapers.

**Charles:** What are we going to get, though? I mean, what do we want? I mean, these guys are hard to come by. (Unintelligible)

**David:** Well, I think if you find anybody, you ought to knock them out...

**Charles:** Yeh.

**David:** ...and drag them down here. (Laughter)
Peter: Shang-hai.

David: We'll put them in a compromising situation, and take a bunch of pictures. (Laughter)

Peter: Go away, please. (Laughter)

Charles: The slide shows are all set. (Laughter)

Scott: Maybe the thing to do is to leave it out and put, uh, corporate - corporate and industrial, whatever the words are -

Steve: Got to be -

Scott: - under the additional areas of interest line.

Robert: Corporate - corporate communication?

Kevin: Corporate and industrial relations.

Charles: Corporate - corporate industrial heteroerosexual. (Laughter)

Michelle: Who wanted mutual gratification. (Laughter)

Andrew: Steve, put on there -

Michelle: Must have a dog act. (Laughter)

David: And pony show. (Laughter)

Charles: That was good, David.

Peter: With - with extra slides. (Laughter)

Like the previous episode discussed, the above is characterized by a competitive repartee of witty one-liners that evokes gales of participative laughter from the group members. Most of the jokes in this sequence are based on ingrainments and, therefore, depend upon shared cultural knowledge for their decipherability. The references to compromising slides are derived
from an ongoing inside joke that recurs several times in the four faculty
meetings that are being studied. (For example, earlier in the same meeting is
the following exchange: “Slides are a great deal, and there’s nothing they
won’t print.” (Laughter) “Because they’ve been tested!” (Laughter)). The
reference to “a dog act” and “a pony show” is based on one faculty
member’s characterization of consultant workshops and presentations as “dog
and pony shows”. The group members all share this knowledge as part of
their cultural heritage, and thus the competitive one-upsmanship in this
episode reinforces community cohesiveness and morale by encouraging
participation and emphasizing commonality of knowledge and experience.

The last example illustrates repartee at its briefest. In the following
episode, the group is discussing a policy that is stated in the orange faculty
handbook.

Robert: Yeh, okay. Go back and read the famous statement in the
- in the orange book.

Charles: The orange book, the little orange book.

Scott: What orange book?

Ruth: Big orange book.

Anne: The one which...

Peter: There’s one by Mao, and there’s one by Robert. (Laughter)

Charles: There’s one by Mao, there’s one by Kaddafi, and there’s one
by Robert. (Laughter)

Peter: We’re using Robert’s. It’s smaller than the others. (Laughter)
What occurs in this episode is a three-turn sequence of competitive repartee between Peter and Charles in which each joke builds on the one before it in a way that results in cumulative humor, i.e., the theme becomes funnier with each elaboration. The force of the humor stems from the incongruity of placing Robert, who leads the group with a nonauthoritarian, democratic style, in the same category as two brutal and ruthless dictators. The jokesters duel with harmless wit here, one-upping each other in a way that gains them recognition for their wittiness and also apparently provides enjoyment and community-building laughter for the group as a whole. In this episode, then, friendly repartee functions to enact competition in a system-integrative, community-building manner.

The Imaginative Function of Story-Telling

A *story* will be treated by this researcher as a narrative that portrays a sequence of events in a humorous and dramatic manner. In the Communication Department culture, one person usually initiates a story and outlines a basic plot, then others either encourage the story-teller to elaborate (via questions and exclamations), or they adopt a theme of the story and develop it in a direction that suits their interests.

The major claim that will be asserted in this section is that storytelling has the unique capacity to engage the audience in a shared imaginative experience. By simulating a common visualization of a dramatic
episode, this researcher believes that a story can strengthen the group's sense of cohesiveness and cultural identity. The communicative process of storytelling also appears to operate in the departmental group as a means of creating cultural heroes, villains, and clowns and providing entertainment for the audience members. Thus, two incidents of extended story-telling will be examined below to illustrate the integrative, imaginative function of storytelling in the Communication Department culture.

The first story-telling episode occurs when the faculty is discussing the computer component of the graduate program.

**Steve:** Okay, I don't uh, uh, I - I just want to...This is one of the things I think they're going to need, is the SPSS, although I - I in - it just hit me. I don't feel quite as badly about our grad students, I guess, because I was over at the Computer Center the other day, and there was a young lady there whom I had helped, who was, uh, getting her uh, um, uh, senior thesis. She was an honor student and very sharp, and was doing some research last year, um, from Human Resources or somewhere, with Dene Klinzing. An uh, was doing all kinds of computer - very sophisticated analysis of, um, some statistical stuff.

**Charles:** So it's Dene and Denny?

**Pamela:** Umm-hmm.

**Anne:** Umm-hmm.

**Steve:** Well, she was back over, and now she's on a graduate program.

**Anne:** Denny's gone, and Dene's here.

**Charles:** Dene and Denny.
Steve: She was putting her cards backwards into the hopper, so you forget that stuff very quickly. (Laughter) And, y'know, the graduate students are scared shitless — (Laughter)

Anne: Sounds like the way they scored my (unintelligible).

Steve: —of going over there and actually getting ahold of a deck of cards and putting them into the computer or getting on the terminal and...afraid they're going to lose their - their...

David: (Unintelligible) I left the rubber band around my deck the first time I tried to run it! (Laughter)

Steve: Oh, me! Well, then she picked the - picked up the - the, y'know, the weight on the top, and, of course, the wind was blowing, y'know, and the cards just — zoom! (Laughter)

Pamela: Oh!

Ruth: Oh gosh!

Steve: We grabbed them before they got...

Ruth: Those - those card readers over there are bad enough to use if you do everything right!

Steve: Oh, they are. They are. They don't read very well, either.

Ruth: Terrible readers.

This story is a humorous one that allows the group members an opportunity to draw upon their own similar experiences and identify with the protagonist of the story. The result is that there is participation in elaborating the story line and the group members validate the drama with supportive responses (e.g., “Umm-hmm”, “Oh, gosh!”). It is claimed that the story functions to bring the community members together because a shared reality is constructed through visualization and imagery, and a sense of
cohesiveness is created as the result. The humorous nature of the theme also appears to provide enjoyment for the group members. Thus story-telling, as a function of its entertainment value, can enhance the morale of the group members, while at the same time, by creating a common reality, it can bolster the integrative forces that are needed to sustain a cultural identity. A similar function is achieved by the next dramatic sequence to be examined.

The second story-telling episode occurs when the group is discussing the unusually high GRE scores of several prospective graduate students.

Peter: Where are all these bright lights coming from?

David: It's part of the prison's early release program. (Laughter)

Peter: Don't laugh! We had a resident release program at Washington. Every one of them took Intro to Mass Comm. (Laughter) Talk about thugs - I was intimidated! (Laughter)

Unknown: “Hey, teach!” (Laughter)

Ruth: You were intimidated? You gave lots of A’s though. (Laughter)

Robert: Could you tell the difference between the instructors and prisoners? (Laughter)

Andrew: It's a good thing we were sharing our office at that time.

Peter: Yeh. Yeh.

Ruth: To protect each other, huh?

Peter: It was really something!

Charles: It was probably the honor wing, too. (Laughter) Seriously...

Robert: Did y'all have a Headstart contract?
Anne: I think they made a mistake in who they released. It's not been discovered yet. (Laughter)

Charles: (Unintelligible) I did some research at, er, uh, uh Ohio State, The Ohio Penn, and they just - they - they had transferred - um - after the riots of '69 and '70, had built a new prison a little further north, and they had just left the honor wing in Columbus, and, uh, some of these guys, I mean, uh, "What are you in for?" You look at them, and you're a foot away, and they say, "Murder One." (Laughter) You don't get any rougher!

Ruth: That's the honor wing.

Charles: Uh-huh, right.

Peter: I once got a call from a counselor that wanted me to show up in Superior Court and discuss qualifications. They're going to yank this guy back. (Garbled) They wanted me to come and say how - how good the student did. (Laughter)

Ruth: Oh, gosh!

David: Did you go?

Peter: Well, actually, yeh.

Charles: He was a good student?

Peter: Yeh, I made a statement. He actually was a good student, yeh, although that didn't cut it.

Charles: So that's where you get the - that's where you got the typewriters.

Peter: He went back.

Ruth: That's where he got the typewriters, that's right. It wasn't Uncle Vito, after all. (Laughter)

Charles: Talk about fantasy chain; here we are! (Laughter)
The stories told above are characterized by the enthusiastic participation of audience members in elaborating the main themes and encouraging the story-tellers to continue. The dramas are initially triggered by a facetious remark made by David. Peter then begins his story-telling by cutting into the group laughter with “Don’t laugh!”; he then proceeds to tell his story in a joking way, hence evoking even more laughter. The technique that Peter uses to introduce his humor enhances its funniness by making a pretense of seriousness, and Charles tries the same trick several turns later when he ends his joke with “Seriously”.

After Peter’s initial story fragment, the group humorously elaborates upon his theme, and Robert and Anne offer some witty put-down jokes. Following Anne’s remark, Charles engages with Peter in a competitive story-telling repartee. In building his drama, Charles uses his experience to one-up Peter in a “You think that’s bad...” manner. Peter responds to this story-telling challenge with a one-up expansion upon his earlier story line. By immediately answering Charles’s story with his own, Peter effectively cuts short any group elaboration on Charles’s drama that might have occurred. The result is that his drama, being last, receives the most comment and elaboration from the group; thus, Peter can be seen to emerge as a victor, in terms of recognition, from his story-telling repartee with Charles. Charles ends the episode by introducing a related fantasy theme, then in the last line, he humorously metacommunicates by labeling the fantasy chain in an explicit way.
This story-telling sequence achieves much the same end as does the first dramatic episode examined. It creates cohesiveness, comraderie, and morale by providing enjoyment and enabling the group members to participate in shared laughter. It is thus claimed that story-telling functions to strengthen the integration of the group members, smooth out the edges on their interdependence, and reinforce the commitment to their culture by creating an imaginative experience in which all can share.

The Social Reality-Constructing Function of Fantasy Chains

At the end of the above sequence, Charles refers to the fact that fantasy chains are a part of the group's communicative repertoire. Charles' comment is made in reference to the beginning of that particular faculty meeting. Robert opens the meeting by saying, "May I, while everybody is signing and socializing and chaining out, uh, ask that..." The group members interrupt him and request clarification (e.g., "What was that latter?", "Could you repeat that again?"). Robert replies, "Chaining out. Don't you know anything about fantasy chains in small group communication?" Ruth ends the discussion with her statement, "Sure. Bormann - Bormann's into that. He's the only one in the world who talks about it, though, and I think he's full of shit!" As Charles points out, however, humorous fantasy chaining is indeed an important facet of the group's enactment of cultural identity.

The term fantasy chain will be used to refer to the phenomenon
that occurs in groups when one member introduces a theme, and that theme is then adopted and elaborated upon by other group members. Bormann (1984) believes that such dramas can both reflect and construct the social reality of a culture. He delineates how a fantasy chain is enacted:

On occasion, people in groups find themselves caught up in a chain of fantasizing similar to the creative moments that an individual experiences. Under the pressure of the fantasy, the constraints that often operate in a group are released, and the members feel free to experiment with ideas, to play with concepts, and to be ridiculous. More and more members are drawn into actual involvement in the communication. Like the abstract painting or the ambiguous modern poem, the original drama serves as a stimulus for the others to interpret or read into it additional meanings or feelings of their own. The total creative involvement of the members creates a meeting in which the flow of meaning is no longer from source to receiver as in the case of man [sic] talking to machine, but, rather, all participants add to a common reservoir of meaning until the result is greater than any one of them could have produced alone. (p.58)

In the Communication Department culture, fantasy chains are seldom serious; they are usually expanded by the incremental addition of witty one-liners. Therefore, the claim that will be made in this section is that humorous fantasy chains accomplish several community-building functions within the faculty's communication: they can entertain group members by encouraging laughter and participation, they can contribute to the group's collective symbolic repertoire and the construction of social reality, and they can enact and reflect the cultural identity of the group.

The first fantasy sequence is based upon the ingrained knowledge of
Peter's role within the department as a "hard-ass". It takes place within a discussion about whether or not it is fair to encourage graduate students to go through the teaching assistant training when there may not be enough money to fund assistantships for all of them afterwards.

Pamela: ...The only trouble I have is whether or not we can ask them to do it, and number two is that, uh, once we get them all prepared, can we very well, with a good conscience, say, "Too bad. It's just for your betterment and..."

Robert: Oh yes —

Ruth: Sure.

Robert: —that has to be an understanding. What this does —

Ruth: We'll let Peter tell them. (Laughter)

Robert: Uh, Peter, well, he'll be the official —

Ruth: Bastard. (Laughter)

Robert: —hit spokesman. (Laughter)

Peter: Hit spokesman?

Charles: The hit person. (Laughter)

Robert: The hit person.

Charles: Hey, your "seester"! (Laughter)

Robert: I've heard about a hitperson. Hit the road.

Charles: (Garbled) your "seester".

Anne: "Sorry, but your GRE's just don't..."

In this episode, Ruth introduces the fantasy theme of Peter as the
“strongarm” of the group; this theme emphasizes the group’s shared perception of one individual’s “place” within the system. By casting Peter in the symbolic role as the “bastard” and “hitperson” of the group, the symbolic reservoir is expanded, and the theme is incorporated into the social reality of the culture. Ruth’s characterization must have some resonance for the group members, because they respond with laughter, and several individuals elaborate on the theme, thereby chaining out the fantasy. In this sequence, then, it is claimed that humor is used in combination with the chaining out of a fantasy theme to construct an integrative social reality, to build a collective symbolic repertoire, to provide entertainment, and to reinforce a cohesive cultural identity.

The second fantasy chain to be examined seems to be oriented mainly towards providing enjoyment, bolstering comraderie and morale, and enacting social reality through humor. The interaction below takes place immediately after a vote has been taken, and Charles has been elected to serve as the union representative for the group.

Charles: As the representative for the department, how would you people feel about me making overtures to the, uh, local Teamsters? (Laughter) (Unintelligible) drive to work, we’re, uh...

Scott: The Teamsters just endorsed Ronald Reagan today, so, uh... (Garbled talk and laughter)

Robert: What is our slogan to be? A K-car in every garage? (Laughter)

Charles: With a plastic bomb in the ignition. (Laughter)
Andrew: You may make an appointment with me any time, Charles. (Laughter)

Charles: Right. Right.

Robert: Are you going to stop work if there's a (unintelligible), are you going to stop work? (Laughter)

Charles: A horse's head - a horse's head. A K-car in every garage, and a horse's head in every bed. (Laughter)

Ruth: That's right. That's right. If the room's too hot, we stop work. (Laughter)

David: Charles, I intend to strike for a window, y'know. (Garbled)

Peter: Well, I'm torn. I'm glad Charles's our representative. Now we won't have to show up for classes, and we'll triple our pay. (Laughter) Just like - just like the rest of the American labor force. (Laughter)

Charles: Oh, Peter, you're so cute. (Laughter)

David: Peter, did you ever hear what happened to scabs back in the thirties? (Laughter)

Charles: Scabs with big mouths, too! (Laughter)

Robert: Uh, one of the - one of the things, now that Charles is elected, I might as well tell you that, (Laughter), for - for every three months distributing the bulletins -

Charles: Flyers.

Robert: - which come to you in the department, you get a two course reduction, (Laughter), every - every semester. That's what the union has brought to you, better working conditions. (Laughter)

Charles: Excellent. Excellent.

Steve: Through chemistry. (Laughter)

Unknown: Look for the union label. (Laughter)
The almost constant laughter in the above episode suggests that the humorous fantasy chain provides quite a bit of enjoyment for the group members, and it enables many to participate in developing the fantasy theme by adding witty one-liners. The elaboration of the theme, in fact, is accomplished largely through a repartee of harmless wit and put-down humor, and it is predicated upon a common knowledge of culturally ingrained information. The ingrainment in this episode focuses upon a particular preoccupation of Charles: he identifies with the movie "The Godfather" to such an extend that he frequently quotes and acts out roles from it, and he emphasizes his working class Italian background to justify the identification. (He even wore a "Mafia Outfit" to his farewell dinner when he left the Communication Department in 1984.)

Since the group has a shared knowledge of Charles' "Mafiosa" persona, the fantasy theme strikes a cord of familiarity, and thus, it stimulates laughter, participation, and a sense of comraderie in the cultural members. Also, since most of the humor in the episode consists of "inside jokes" based upon shared experiences, the fantasy chain ultimately bolsters the group members' cohesiveness and reinforces their cultural identity. The fantasy chaining sequence above, then, can be seen as accomplishing the exercise and expansion of the group's symbolic repertoire, and it both enacts and contributes to the group's social reality as a result.

This section on the community-building functions of humor has
examined in detail the ways in which harmless wit, self-directed joking, outsider put-downs, friendly repartee, stories, and fantasy chains can all enact integration in the Communication Department culture. From a detailed study of the conversational data, several claims were made concerning what each of these forms of humor accomplish in the culture. Though they all serve similar community-building functions, each enacts these functions in a unique manner. It was claimed that: harmless wit fulfills an enjoyment and commonality-reinforcing function; self-directed humor serves the function of affirming the group’s common synergistic understanding; outsider put-downs reinforce solidarity; repartee provides an integrative means of exercising competitive tendencies; story-telling allows the group to participate in a shared imaginative experience; and fantasy chains fulfill the function of constructing and expressing social reality. In conclusion, this researcher claims that these community-building aspects of humor all contribute to the group members’ enactment of an integrated cultural identity.

In Chapter Four, humor was seen to balance the tension between hierarchy and egalitarianism in the group’s enactment of the cultural power structure. In this chapter, the social control aspect of humor was illustrated with conversational data, and it’s function in managing the forces of differentiation was explored. Community-building humor was then discussed, and its integrative function was demonstrated through actual segments of interaction. This analysis, then, suggests that humor is a vitally important component of the faculty’s communication. It is a strategy that is used by
the group to balance the dialectical forces of differentiation and integration that arise whenever individuals attempt to unite into a cooperative team. Humor also serves to regulate the interdependence among the members of the group in a way that boosts morale and strengthens the group members' sense of themselves as a unique and special ensemble. Thus, the use of humor as a communicative strategy is an integral part of the group's enactment of cultural identity.

**Metacommunication**

One question that remains to be addressed, however is the following: if humor is so much a part of the enactment of culture in the Communication Department, to what extent are the faculty members themselves aware of its centrality? To state the question differently, how do the group members perceive humor in relation to their cultural identity? The answer to this question can be found in episodes in which the faculty members metacommunicate, i.e., discuss and analyze their own communication. Three such conversations occur in the data, and they will be analyzed below.

The first instance of metacommunication occurs when there is a lull after an extended period of serious conversation. The metacommunicative sequence is followed by a humorous one in which the group members, in essence, respond to the charges raised by their metacommunication.
Ruth: Gee, we're a really jolly lot today.

David: (Unintelligible)

Charles: Well, it's all Robert's fault. (Garbled)

Peter: Yeh, I know. Jesus.

Kevin: Did he preface this meeting a special way?

Ruth: He stood at the podium.

Charles: Well, it happened last week.

Kevin: Oh.

Ruth: Really.

Peter: I hope it wears off soon.

Ruth: I hope so.

Charles: Yeh, we want to keep things loose, and Robert said, "Okay".

Michelle: Peter, tell some dirty jokes.

Kevin: You know what it is. It's the CIA taping that's going on. (Laughter)

Robert: (Garbled) David wanted to be the representative to the secret police for the department?

David: Yes.

Ruth: Yup. Now that Reagan's in. I have a feeling that we need that. (Laughter)

David: I'd like to be keeper of ideological purity. (Laughter) You'll all report your movements to me on an hourly basis. I'll be installing recorders in your telephones for the...

Michelle: All right.

Charles: You want - you want to be the pigment officer, too, right?
David: Yes, that's right. And I'll be - I'll be arranging individual meetings to discuss baksheesh. (Laughter)

Michelle: Excuse me, David. I'm going to go potty. (Laughter)

In the above episode, Ruth initiates metacommunication by commenting about what she perceives to be the group's uncharacteristically subdued communication style. Charles blames the seriousness on Robert's norm violation of beginning the meeting from behind a podium. The group members appear to be disturbed by this unintentional change in one of the key characteristics of their cultural identity (i.e., humorous communication), and thus they focus blame on a scapegoat, express their desire to resume their usual style, and appeal to each other to initiate the transition back into the humorous realm.

Kevin finally breaks the cycle of seriousness by making an ingrained joking reference to the fact that the faculty meeting is being taped. Kevin's comment is picked up by the group as a fantasy theme, and that theme is chained out by a repartee of harmless wit. Thus, in this episode, it is claimed that the group members metacommunicatively establish that they value humor as a part of their cultural identity. When they perceive themselves to be unduly serious, they transpose their communication back onto a humorous level. They thereby boost their morale and reaffirm the forces of integration through community-building humor.
The second episode of metacommunication occurs at the end of the same meeting in which the above interaction took place. The sequence begins with the group members using ingrained joking to indirectly blame Robert again for the seriousness of the meeting. It ends with the group extracting a promise from Robert that the stiff formality won't happen again, and that he will resume his old style of leadership by the next meeting.

Robert: ...The procedure is not outlined as fully as it needs to be.

Scott: Not as fully as the telephone calls. (Laughter)

Michelle: In the beginning was the phone. (Laughter)

Charles: Robert is loosening up now - we're talking about telephones! (Laughter) Took an hour, took an hour...

Peter: ...I gotta go to a meeting. Excuse me.

Robert: Is there anything else?

Peter: Yeh, if you continue to run these like a business meeting, let me know, because, uh, I'm staying home.

Robert: Naw. No. No. We're back to square one. (Garbled)

Ruth: Aw, good!

Charles: No more podiums? (Garbled)

Ruth: He stood up there at the podium!

Here Peter is direct in voicing what appears to be the general consensus: the group treasures its humorous communication style, and the faculty will rebel if that style is jeopardized or if change is forced upon them by their leader. The group members seem to evince an attitude of self-
righteous indignation that that which makes the departmental culture special and enjoyable to its members is, to their perception, being challenged. It is claimed, then, that as a result of the outrage the faculty members communicate, Robert is forced to recognize and affirm the centrality of humor to the group's cultural identity.

The last sequence of metacommunication is an extended one. It begins with Anne's suggestion that the graduate students who attend the faculty meetings may be uneasy with the group's communication style.

Anne: I was, um, in the faculty meeting last Thursday and made a special point of monitoring the graduate student reactions when we started talking about the program. And most of the comments we made ended up, I think, making the graduate students feel very uncomfortable. And I - I felt for the first time, I could understand some of the, um, uneasiness of the fa- of the graduate students, because I thought that if we - as much as we kid and joke around about the program, and I think that's a way of not taking ourselves too seriously and is valuable for that, I think the students perhaps don't share that perspective, and they tend to disvalue the program, because they misinterpret or misunderstand those comments for what they mean.

The group members respond to Anne's observation with what appears to be a shocked silence. Andrew then asks for clarification, "Are you referring to the jocularity?" and Anne replies, "Not just that, some of the comments as well." At this point, Robert explicitly raises the question of whether the group should make a conscious decision to change its communication style by substituting seriousness for levity. The following
sequence is the group’s response to Robert’s question.

Ruth: I think if the problem is in how we perceive the graduate students are perceiving the meetings, then we should talk with the graduate students about it and deal with it at that level.

Peter: Or perhaps teach them enough about communication so they understand in advance. (Laughter)

Steve: Yeh, but when you joke about a program, uh, it doesn’t come across as being a very serious - if you’re not very serious about a program, they’re going to wonder, uh, “My God, if you aren’t serious about -”

Peter: Well, who’s - but who’s not serious, Steve? When it comes time for performance, it’s there.

Steve: Well, oh - oh, I’m sure that we all are, but -

Ruth: We’re all serious in what we demand from the students.

Steve: Yeh, that’s true, and that - so that’s a difference that they pick up. If you talk about it, very likely –

Charles: But then they’re targeting on a wrong behavior. They’re wrong, and you just tell them they’re wrong! (Laughter)

Steve: Yeh, that’s true. Yeh. (Laughter) That’s true, but –

David: “Stop being uncomfortable.” (Laughter)

Ruth: That’s right. (Laughter)

Robert: “You’re wrong.” (Laughter)

Here the group members are using put-down humor to parody the students for confusing the faculty’s academic philosophy with their communicative style. They are uniting against an outside threat (the students) and an inside threat (Anne’s and Steve’s questioning) to defend
their cultural identity as an informal and humorous group. One way this
defense is accomplished is through suggesting that if the graduate students
knew anything about communication, they would understand the importance
of humor in managing interdependence among group members.

The faculty members go on to discuss the possibility that the
students feel uncomfortable because the same people don’t go to every
meeting, and thus, they have no sense of continuity. David then summarizes
what the other group members feel about the issue, namely that humor is
essential to smooth functioning of the group.

David: ...I wouldn’t know how - how our graduate students could be
comfortable sitting in on our faculty meeting anyway, uh, and
what their expectations would be about it, and I think the
business of running this department, getting the work that we
have to get done, depends a lot more on whether we can
work together or not, and if that’s the atmosphere that’s
developed for - for getting the job done, we can always,
y’know, bring our graduate students aside and say, “Now look,
I understand this may look kind of strange to you, but it
really does work for us, and that’s the point of the whole
thing, isn’t it?”

Charles: Hear, hear!

Ruth: “And let’s teach you a little bit about communication!”

Pamela: Yaaay!

Steve: And - and maybe - maybe in that sense, though, we should
ask them to - to pick a person, rather than having it al
- alternate that way, because I think what - what Andrew
brought out is - is really one of the keys. They only get in
maybe once or twice a semester, and so then we are always
discussing something different, and if there was one person
who got into that, it doesn’t take very long to realize that
In the above sequence, David refers to the group maintenance function of humor and is greeted with cheers of affirmation from the group members. This interaction demonstrates that the faculty are aware of the importance of humor in balancing dialectical forces such as hierarchy and egalitarianism, and differentiation and integration. In essence, David suggests that humor is central both to the smooth functioning of the group’s interdependent parts and also to the identity of the culture as an integrated whole (i.e., as Steve states, “We’re all a bunch of nuts.”). It can be claimed, then, that humor is one communicative strategy that is used to transform a group of individual faculty members into a cohesive departmental team. Robert later reaffirms the clarity of David’s perspective on the issue by saying, “Ah, your comment was eloquently put, about working together, Brother David.”

Robert ends the group’s metacommunication about the importance of humor with the following story.

**Robert:** The, uh, Chair of the Geography Department said the other day that there was, a move about two years ago that undergraduates wanted to come to their faculty meetings, and, uh, they’re a fairly serious group of people, Geology Department - Geography Department. So they - they’ve found - they allowed, on a rotating basis, students to come. Said the other day that their faculty meetings are so deadly and so dry that they now can’t get anybody to come! (Laughter) They regularly solicit and no one shows up. They can’t get students! (Laughter)
This concluding story functions to reaffirm the validity of the department's humorous communication style by parodying the plight of a department whose meetings are antithetically "deadly" and "dry". The implication in this story is that "our" way of communicating must be better because at least "our" students come to the meetings. The story thus summarizes the main theme of the metacommunication, that is, that humor is desirable and necessary, and it also emphasizes the importance of humor to the group members' perception of their own identity as a culture. This researcher claims, then, that the entire episode illustrates that the faculty are aware of the centrality of humor to their culture and that they value its many facets and functions.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing analysis focused upon the communicative enactment of a unique organizational culture: the Communication Department of the University of Delaware. This culture is an unusual one within the University's departmental system. It is characterized by norms of humorous communication, openness, informality, egalitarianism, comraderie, participative decision-making, and indirect leadership. Each of these facets of group reality is created by and enacted in the group members' communication, and each contributes synergistically to the identity of the culture as a whole. Stated in a slightly different way, as humor and other communicative strategies are used to regulate interdependence in the system, a shared image of the group in its totality and each individual's place within it emerges. Cultural identity, then, as seen from both the inside and the outside, is dynamic and evolves as a direct result of the communicative interactions of the members. Thus, the faculty's use of humor as a communicative strategy is of central importance in understanding the departmental culture.

From examining the discourse, we have seen that the humor use in the Communication Department is varied and rich; the conversational data
from four faculty meetings provided instances of many kinds of humor, including sarcasm, parody, put-downs, stories, fantasy chains, hostile joking, friendly repartee, harmless wit, self-directed joking, and ingrained inside joking. The communication of this faculty group thus offered an especially apt focus for a conversational analysis of the ways in which humor is used as a communicative strategy.

The naturalistic, interpretive method employed in the investigation was also uniquely suited to the focus of study. This method made possible a holistic approach, where the organizational culture itself and the researcher's experience were used as a context for describing, interpreting, and understanding the conversation that occurred among cultural members. This perspective also enabled patterns to emerge from the data because it freed the researcher from having to impose apriori categories upon the communication.

The patterns that became apparent from studying the data were amenable to a dialectical analysis. This approach is in accord with the philosophy of qualitative research since it emphasizes the social construction of reality, the totality of the culture being studied, the omnipresence of change, and the ubiquity of contradiction. Contradiction emerged from the data as a major structural component in the group members' interactions. From this it was posited that humor plays a vital communicative function in balancing the dialectical forces in the organizational culture.
The conceptual schema that emerged from the dialectical analysis indicated that those are the two major areas in which humor plays an integral role: the enactment of power structure, and the enactment of cultural identity. In Chapter 4, it was claimed that humor is used in the group's enactment of power structure to balance the dialectical forces of hierarchy and egalitarianism. The tension between these two forces can be seen in the group's contradictory needs for leadership versus participative decision-making, structure versus flexibility, task accomplishment versus social maintenance, F1 versus F2 communication, and status positions versus informality. Thus, we saw that humor functions to manage these paradoxical forces in a complementary way.

The use of humor as a communicative enactment of the power structure was traced in detail in Chapter 4 through opening power negotiations, status-leveling episodes, and compliance-gaining interactions. It was claimed that the power negotiations which open each faculty meeting are characterized by the Chair attempting to lead the group from social banter and joking towards more serious, task oriented discussion of the issues on the agenda. It was also suggested that the Chair must guide the group to this transition in communication style in an indirect manner so as not to violate the norm of egalitarianism, and that humor, as a communicative strategy, is particularly suited to such a mission. When the Chair exerts control in too overt a manner, however, we have seen that the group responds rebelliously by using humor to sabotage his power moves. Thus, the claim can be made
that humor is employed by both the leader and the group in opening power negotiations to maintain the delicate balance between hierarchy and egalitarianism.

In the status-leveling episodes, it was posited that humor functions as a means of equalizing any differential power, position, or prestige among the group members that threatens to disrupt the egalitarian equilibrium. Much of the status-leveling humor the group uses is directed towards Robert, since his position as Departmental Chair automatically sets him apart from the faculty. In addition, one of the sequences analyzed demonstrates that status-leveling humor can be used to raise the status of group members, as well as to lower it. This particular episode illustrates humor being used to temporarily elevate the status of graduate students so that they can suspend their norm of silence and contribute to the discussion. In this section, then, it was claimed that status-leveling humor is one way in which the group manages dialectical tension in the enactment of the power structure.

Lastly, in Chapter 4, the use of humor as a compliance-gaining strategy was explored. This part of the analysis indicated that the Chair employs humor as an indirect communicative strategy to gain the group's compliance. It was suggested that in order to minimize resistance to his suggestions, the Chair undermines objections with humor, portrays the situation as one of choice, stresses the benefits and positive aspects of the issue, and jokes along with the group as "one of the guys", all the while
subtly steering the communication towards consensus and compliance. Thus, in the exercise of compliance-gaining tactics, we saw humor being used to enact power in an indirect way so as to avoid violating the norm of egalitarianism that is so central to the group’s culture.

Chapter 5 focused upon the enactment of cultural identity. In order to explicate the dialectical forces of differentiation and integration out of which the group’s cultural identity grows, a team metaphor was used. This metaphor is particularly apt for the Communication Department’s organizational culture because it clearly portrays the tension that exists between competition and cooperation, individuality and collectivity, personal goals and group goals, and independence and dependence. It was suggested that humor is used by the group members to balance these opposing tendencies and regulate the interdependence among members of the team.

Two general facets of humor use were discussed in relation to the enactment of cultural identity. In the first section of Chapter 5, we saw that humor can be used by the group to fulfill the social control function of managing tension, aggression, conflict, norm violations, competition, and misunderstandings. The analysis of specific episodes indicated that the group members often attempt to shape each others’ behavior by applying negative sanctions through hostile joking, put-downs of group members, sarcasm, and parody. Thus, it was claimed that the faculty employ humor to enact social control, and hence, to communicatively regulate the forces of differentiation.
that could potentially threaten their cultural survival.

The other broad function of humor use evinced in the faculty's enactment of cultural identity is community-building. It was posited that the group uses humor in a community-building manner to reinforce cohesiveness, comraderie, morale, and norm-following behavior. Several specific examples of community-building humor were explored: wit, self-directed joking, outsider put-downs, friendly repartee, stories, and fantasy chains. An investigation of the faculty's interactions suggests that each of these forms of humor functions in its own unique way as a communicative strategy for bolstering the integration that is so essential to the group's identity as a culture.

In this section on the community-building functions of humor, several claims were made concerning the ways in which the abovementioned facets of humor operate in the group's interaction. It was asserted that: wit provides enjoyment and reinforces commonality; self-directed humor affirms the group members' understanding of the culture's synergistic configuration; outsider put-downs bolster solidarity; repartee enables the group to manage competition in an integrative manner; stories strengthen cohesiveness and cultural identity by engaging group members in a shared imaginative experience; and fantasy chains accomplish the creation and enactment of the social reality of the culture.

Lastly, in Chapter 5, a section on metacommunication explored the
ways in which the faculty members express their understanding of the role that humor plays in their enactment of cultural identity. From an analysis of several episodes where the faculty explicitly communicate about their interaction, it was posited that the group members are aware of their humorous communication, appreciate its centrality to cultural identity, realize its importance in managing interdependence, and value the comraderie and high morale that their humor use can generate.

From Chapters 4 and 5, then, it is claimed that in the enactment of power structure and the enactment of cultural identity, the Communication Department faculty uses humor to manage contradictions in a system-integrative way. Putnam (in press) believes that contradictions in an organizational culture are structurally grounded opposing forces that arise from people's efforts to adapt to a dynamically evolving environment. She points out that the term "paradox" is derived from a Greek word which means to "reconcile two apparently conflicting views" (p.5). As was mentioned in Chapter 2, Putnam (in press) cites three ways of coping with contradiction: 1) we can accept only one message and ignore any inconsistency; and 2) we can accept both polarities and muddle along within the contradiction; or 3) we can construct a creative alternative by synthesizing the paradoxical elements into a coherent whole.

It is this researcher's major claim that the use of humor accomplishes the third option for the organizational culture of the
Communication Department. Humor functions as a communicative strategy that allows the group to integrate dialectically opposing forces into a coherent cultural identity. As Putnam (in press) states, “People who can use contradictory situations to develop creative alternatives display a unique type of organizational wisdom” (p.12). This researcher's belief, based upon the interactional data and the group's metacommunication, is that the faculty members cultivate their use of humor as a way of balancing and regulating contradiction in a creative, organizationally wise manner.

Humor is uniquely suited to this role as an integrative mechanism. As Putnam (in press) points out, “Contradictions frequently evolve from multiple levels of communication. That is, since we derive meanings from different levels of interaction, e.g., verbal-nonverbal, literal-metaphorical, abstract-concrete, and content-relationship, incompatibility between levels is easily conceivable” (p.2). Many of the group's interactions demonstrate that humor can operate on several layers of meaning; that joking relationships can paradoxically combine elements of friendliness, antagonism, comraderie, and competition; and that the content and the relationship messages conveyed by the same jocular communication may have more than one level of implication.6

5For example, outsider put-downs can reinforce solidarity, cultivate a shared sense of superiority, and reaffirm the culture's hierarchical position simultaneously.

6For example, what appears to be a simple pun on the content level can also be a put-down on a relational level.
Therefore, since humor can function on multiple levels of meaning, it can be used by group members to comment upon and manage the contradictions that emerge from the layered meanings inherent in any communicative context. In sum, this researcher concludes that humor is the "creative alternative" that allows the group to balance structural contradictions such as hierarchy versus egalitarianism, and differentiation versus integration, in such a way that cultural cohesiveness is strengthened rather than dissipated.

After conducting this in-depth interpretive study of humor in an organizational culture, it is this researcher's opinion that a traditional, quantitative approach to analyzing humor would be like dissecting a frog: the parts and their functions may be clearly exposed, but the living, breathing, hopping amphibian that excited investigative interest in the first place would no longer exist. It is hoped that by approaching humor in a qualitative manner, treating it holistically as a manifestation of culture, presenting the actual discourse in which it occurs, and interpreting patterns on a macroscopic level using the culture as context, some of the dynamism of humor as a communicative strategy has been preserved.

Additional qualitative exploration of the ways in which humor functions as a communicative strategy in other organizational cultures is strongly suggested. This researcher believes that through other such analyses, the full richness and intricacy of humorous communication may begin to be
revealed by a process of cultural comparison. Other potential areas of investigation in humor use include: humor as a means of regulating tension between interdependent people of different genders, classes, races, and religions; humor as a conflict management strategy; the function of the "clown" role in an organizational culture; humor as a mechanism of socialization; and the ways in which humor functions in larger societal cultures or smaller familial cultures.

In conclusion, this analysis has clearly indicated that humor can be a central communicative component of an organizational culture. Humor, however, has been the focus of investigation by communication scholars only rarely; in fact, most of the research reviewed in Chapter 1 of this discussion stems from the disciplines of psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Therefore, it is hoped that this study will prompt further research on humor from an explicitly communicative perspective. It is this researcher's belief that only if this shift occurs will we begin to understand humor as a communicative strategy in all its richness, complexity, and depth.
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