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ANT 101

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That was *Sooo* Funny

“Laughter is the best medicine.” We’ve all heard that saying before, hopefully, and laughter could very well be the best medicine out there, not to mention, it’s completely free. Laughing can turn a gloomy day into a sunny day, it can make a sad, depressing person into a bright, happy person. If you want to take the quote literally, laughing increases the production of antibodies in your immune system and, if you laugh long enough, it can also give you a nice ab work-out. Americans, and other people across the globe, love a good laugh. We have a whole genre of comedic movies, live comedy shows, comedy TV shows, and even students who dedicate themselves to be the class clown. In fact, Drop Kick Slurpee, a comedy improv group at UIUC, put on a show at the Courtyard Café in the Illini Union to give their audience something to laugh about. After some careful people watching, I noticed a distinct difference of social interactions in the audience before and during the comedy act.

As mentioned before, Kick Drop Slurpee put on a comedy show at the Courtyard Café in the Illini Union. The venue was an open area with about five rows of seats arranged in front of a small stage. A few round tables set up on the very far left and right of the floor and also in the very back of the room. It was nearly a full-house with only a few empty seats, however, a few decided to stand off the side and watch. Because this event took place over Mom’s Weekend, I expected a higher number of older female adults present at the event than there would’ve been on a typical day, as well as, more females than males in general. As I expected, there was a fair amount of older adults present, however, college-age students still made up about 80% of the audience and the gender distribution between males and

females were almost equal, since a number of dads showed up too, but there was a little more college-aged girls than guys.

The audience divided themselves primarily between friend groups and families. Some groups included two families who knew each other or had children who were friends, in which case, the parents would introduce themselves and shake hands. It was easy to identify groups who were in a relationship based on friendship versus groups who were in a relationship based on kinship. According to Lavenda and Schultz, a friendship is “an unofficial bond that people construct with one another that tend to be personal, emotional, affective, and often a matter of choice,” while a kinship is a result from bonds in marriage and birth descents (2015:374, 406). Members in the friends group were usually all girls or all guys around the same age with no parent(s) while members in the family group were a mixture of guys and girls, such a mom and her son or a mom and dad with their daughter, and so on. On the surface, the some of the family groups seemed like non-conjugal families, a women and her children, while other family groups looked like nuclear families, a mom and dad with their unmarried children (2015: 396, 398). However, as mentioned before, it was Mom’s Weekend, so the non-conjugal families may actually have a husband/father who was not present at the event.

When I place myself within the audience, I was the odd one out, even though I was the same age, gender, and demographics as most of the other people in the room. Everyone came to the show with friends and family with the intention to actually watch the comedy act. I, on the other hand, came by myself and had my laptop out as though I was doing homework. In other words, I was the only one present at the event not looking for entertainment and was being academically productive instead.

Drop Kick Slurpee was scheduled to perform at 8:00 pm but before then, the audience interacted within their own groups. In general, the group of friends all had their phones visibly out while socially interacting with each other, however, the groups full of all girls interacted very differently than the groups of all guys. The girls interacted socially with the aid of their phones, for instance, they would take

selfies, take Snapchats, and show each other what's on their Facebook newsfeed. The guys, however, did not socialize with their phones, instead, they mostly communicated verbally with each other and scroll through Facebook or social media when they weren't interacting.

Girls would also turn to face each other, make eye-contact, and use other nonverbal cues when communicating verbally, such as hand gestures. Guys, on the other hand, sat next to each other facing the same way. When they interacted, they would continue facing the front and not turn their entire bodies towards each other like the girls did. Sometimes the guys would make eye-contact just by turning their heads or leaning their head towards the speaker so they can hear better, but more often than not, no eye-contact was made for more than 3 minutes. Often times, one girl would say something and her friend would respond by laughing or exclaiming, "Oh my god!" or "That is *soo* funny!" There were a few cases where one girl would be talking while her friend would be looking down at her phone but nodding to let her friend know she was listening. Unfortunately, the girl groups were significantly louder than friend groups full of guys, so I was unable to hear any communication between the guy friends.

Both girl and guy friend groups, for the most part, greeted someone they knew the same way. They would put their hand on their friend's shoulder from behind and smile or wave and say "hey." There were few high-fives and light, "love-taps" on the back used as greetings, too. The guys would sometimes use a more "aggressive" form of greeting, such as slapping their hands together for a firm handshake, while the girls would sometimes greet each other with hugs. I also observed a couple awkward situations when two people, who only know each other because of a common acquaintance, would greet each other but were unsure whether to shake hands or hug, so they end up just saying "hi" and awkwardly playing with their hands. When two moms, who know one another, would greet, they would hug and usually say something along the lines, "how are you?" or "it's so good to see you again." If two moms did not know each other, they would lightly shake hands and say, "Hi, I'm *insert name*."

The group of families interacted very differently from the group of friends. The children would talk more politely with the adults, so there was no cussing, outburst of laughter, or exclamations of “oh my god.” Most parents ask their child about how school was going, new changes around the school, and upcoming exams or projects. From the several family groups I observed, I noticed that, in general, the parents did not have their phones visibly out and directly interacted with the kids or other parents while their kids had their phones visibly out and would scroll through the social media. Some kids would look up from their phones and talk to their parents if they were asked a question or was briefly included in the conversation but would look back down at their phones once they have said their two-cents. Other kids interacted with their family more than they did with their phones. Most of the families also took selfies to have a memory of that day and possibly to show their other family and family friends. Definitely not to send over Snapchat to show everyone their having a lot of fun, like friends would do.

I also happened to observe two distinct families before the comedy performance. One family consisted of a college-aged daughter, a son about 13 years-old, a mom, and a dad. They sat down at one of the tables and played a card game while laughing and enjoying each other’s company. Another family consisted of a mom, her college-aged daughter, and her college-aged son. These three did not interact with each other at all, instead, they all were looking down at their own phones with unsmiling faces. The difference in social interactions between these two families say a lot about their family relationship and how close they are.

The family who was playing a card game together interacted in a way that shows evidence that they are a close-knit family with good relationships between each of the family member. The other family, who did not interact with each other, showed evidence that they did not have a close relationship with each other. Dr. Kristin Moore researched the relationship and interaction trends between a large group of parents and their teenage children and found that about 76% to 79% of the teenagers enjoy spending time with their parents and thinks highly of them while about 70% of the

teenagers surveyed also have a close relationship with their parents (2004: 2,3). This suggests a direct correlation between the relationship and interaction between a parent and a child. About the same amount of children who had a good, close relationship with their parents also enjoyed spending time with their parents, which was demonstrated with the family playing cards. Other studies were done globally and showed that children with close relationship with their parents enjoyed eating meals with them and talking about political news, books, movies, and general problems in their life (2004: 5). From the statistics and studies from Dr. Moore, I inferred that children that do not have close relationship with their parents also do not enjoy spending time and interacting with them, which was demonstrated by the second family.

The audience took a drastic turn in social interactions once Kick Drop Slurpee took the stage. All the individual social interactions between group members discontinued and all eyes focused on the performers, although, a few members in the audience continued to look down at their phones. After Kick Drop Slurpee introduced themselves to the audience, the entire audience erupted into a loud and welcoming round of applause, along with a few loud “whoops.” Throughout the comedy act, the audience stayed attentive to the comedy act with a few people making side comments to their friends or family about the performance, such as, “did you see that?” or “I don’t get.” Also during the show, nobody walked across the room in front of the audience, like some people did before the show. Instead, people just passing through would walk on the far ends of the room, out of everyone’s way while those who were looking for seats to watch would crouch down and quietly apologize for being in anyone’s way.

Since this was a comedy show, there was bound to be laughter throughout the act. At least every five or so minutes, the whole audience would loudly and cheerfully laugh at the jokes or acting done by the performers. Loud and slow claps were often accompanied with the laughing and even some foot stomping. There would always be a handful of people quietly chuckling throughout the entire

act, however, there were times when one person would obnoxiously laugh and crackle when everyone else was fairly quiet. When this happened, all eyes would turn towards the sound of the loud, obnoxious laugh. Some eyes would smile with the look of “that person is having a lot of fun” while others had the annoying look of “that person needs to calm down.” However, when the majority of the audience laughed at the jokes, some members of their friend or family group would make eye contact with each other while smiling and, essentially, laugh together at the joke. When the majority of the audience was not loudly laughing, they were paying attention to the performers with a slight grin, or a big grin, on their faces. Many of the people in the audience were smiling as though they were expecting and waiting the next punchline.

The performers interacted much differently than the audience, obviously, since they were the stars of the show. In the beginning, they put on their best, smiling faces and acknowledged the audience. Once the performers began their act, they put on their game faces and were ready for some funny actions. Not once did they acknowledge or make eye contact with the audience, but, instead, they solely focused on their interactions with the other performers and their overall act. However, the several times when the entire audience erupted into a fit of laughter, the performers would pause and wait for the noise to settle down before continuing. Different accents, such as a Boston accent or a British accent, would be used to make the act more entertaining and funny, as well as different facial expressions. At the end of the show, the performers lined up on stage, bowed, and thanked their audience for coming while the audience burst into a round of applause with shouts of “whoops,” just like they did in the beginning of the show.

Drop Kick Slurpee used a couple different types of humor in their act to entertain the audience, such as dry, epigrammatic, irony and sarcastic humor. According to Mark Nichol, dry humor, also called deadpan humor, is humor that is presented with an expressionless face with a “matter-of-fact” tone (2015:1). One performer, in particular, often used this form of humor, which always got a lot of laughs.

For instance, the performer was getting a haircut and kept insisting to get it cut shorter and shorter until the barber mentioned that if he cut anymore, it would be his scalp. In response, the performer stated, as though it was obvious, “It’s okay, just cut the scalp.”

Epigrammatic humor is humor with clever or witty sayings, also according to Nichol, and are similar to puns (2015: 1). The comedy act consisted of a lot of puns or epigrammatic humor (maybe too many), however, it didn’t always get a large response from the audience. Irony/sarcasm, on the other hand, did get a bigger response and was also a main theme of the show. For example, one of performers exclaimed, “It’s a printer, it will always work. Nothing will go wrong!” Of course, the irony is that most people often have problems with printer *not* working. Another joke was when one performer was talking to his “girlfriend” on the phone and asked what she was wearing. She said khakis and the performer responded by gushing, “Ohhh that’s hot,” when we all know khakis is not hot.

Most of the jokes and acts that got the audience roaring in laughter were purely situational, which is what most sitcoms are based off of (2015:1). One act, that I particularly liked and followed, was about a bank robbery and it went something like this:

Robber: I have so much debt and I don’t have the money to repay it. I know! I’m going to rob a bank. *(Walks into the store and pretends to point a gun at the clerk)*

Clerk: Oh boy...my first customer in 30 years. *(Monotone voice)*

Robber: What? No this a bank robbery

Person 1: Wait, Robert is here? *(Excitingly)*

Robber: No! This a robbery, give me your money

Clerk: Not Robert. Robert is dead.

Person 2: I remember Robert. His favorite color was indigo

Person 1: Who the heck likes indigo, it was definitely blue

Robber: Shut up! I want your money

The act ended with all the performers conducting a funeral visitation for Robert. Another situational act was when the performer was ranting about a serious topic and exclaimed, "If this goes on the crime *rave* will go up." He instantly noticed his mistake and loudly stated in an obnoxious voice, "I meant to say crime rate but I said crime RAVE, my god," which gave the audience a good laugh. Other jokes were made based of popular news, such as SeaWorld treating their sea creatures inhumanely, and politics, especially with presidential candidates being a popular topic. Overall, all the jokes and acts were clean, full of puns, and could be labeled as a family-friendly event, which, I think, is the opposite of what most humor is like today.

Looking at today's entertainment and social media, most of the humor is based off of sexual references, also known as blue humor according to Nichol (2015:1), and racial stereotypes. Two great examples of this are the comedic movies, *Deadpool* and *Rush Hour*. Right off the bat, I can tell you the humor in these movies are radically different from the popular 1950's comedy TV show, *I Love Lucy*.

The recently released *Deadpool* was actually the highest grossing rated-R movie in history with an earnings of \$746 million (2016: 1) and I also contributed to that \$746 million. Shortly before the release of *Deadpool*, I remember seeing videos on my Facebook newsfeed that warned parents and families that *Deadpool* was not your ordinary superhero movie and you should not bring your family and young kids to go see it in theaters. From my friends, who saw the movie, and from my own experience, I concluded that *Deadpool* became so popular, not only because Ryan Reynolds was the leading actor, but also because the movie's humor was notoriously sexual while being an action-packed, "superhero" movie. One "funny," sexual statement from the movie trailer was when one of the character described Deadpool's face as, "You look like an avocado that had sex with an older avocado." (2016: 6). Two of America's favorite things, sexual humor and action, are combined into one cool villainous superhero movie, so why wouldn't it be so popular.

Rush Hour 2 is another comedy/action movie that came out in 2001, featuring Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker (2001: 1). Although there was not many sexual references or blue humor, there was quite a few racial jokes that were intended to make the viewers laugh. An example of this is when Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker were fighting some bad guys and Chris accidentally punches Jackie. Jackie looks at him, like why did you punch me, and Chris shrieks in a high pitch tone, "You all look alike," referring to the stereotype that all Asians look the same. I personally thought this scene was a little bit funny when I watched *Rush Hour 2* and I'm sure many other people did, too. In fact, from what I observed on the media, in school, and between friends, many people makes funny comments or jokes relating to ethnic stereotypes and even gender stereotypes, the most popular being the "dumb blonde" jokes.

When we compare *Deadpool* and *Rush Hour* to the 1950's TV show *I Love Lucy*, the sense of humor is completely different, yet it still achieved the goal of making the audience smile and laugh. One of my favorite, and probably the most popular, episodes of *I Love Lucy* is "Job Switching" (1952: 2). In this episode, Ricky is angry that his wife, Lucy, spends all of his hard-earned money, so Lucy and her best friend, Ethel, both decide to work at a chocolate factory to earn some money. In my opinion, the funniest part was when the girls were in charge of wrapping the chocolate candy as the candy passed through on the conveyer belt. At first, the conveyer belt was moving at a nice slow pace that allowed Lucy and Ethel to easily wrap the chocolate candy, however, the conveyer belt started moving faster and faster. Lucy and Ethel were unable to keep up with fast pace, and, in fear of losing their jobs because they didn't wrap all the candy, they started stuffing the candy in their mouths, hats, and clothes to hide the unwrapped candy evidence (1952:2). This scene was a favorite among many viewers, and I even remember my history teacher saying how much he loved this scene. The humor in *I Love Lucy* is full of bad puns, sarcasm, and situational jokes that are clean and great for all ages, yet, it still continued to make people laugh today.

When comparing the different types of humor used, Kick Drop Slurpee used humor that reflected the humor in *I Love Lucy* rather than *Deadpool* or *Rush Hour*. It did not contain any blue humor, racial jokes, or swearing. In contrast, *I Love Lucy* did not contain humor pertaining to politics, news, or celebrities like some of the jokes done by Kick Drop Slurpee. Looking at the general American humor in the year 2016, I felt as though Kick Drop Slurpee did not reflect the type of humor that Americans like to see, generally speaking. Most Americans like the blue humor and humor based off of stereotypes. Even if they might not go seek out kind of entertainments in movies, shows, etc., they themselves might tell those types of jokes or laugh when their friends tell those types of jokes. America's sense of humor has definitely changed throughout the years, causing the entertainment industry to change what type of humor it's producing.

However, the one thing that did not change is that people still love to laugh wherever they might be and with whomever they might be with. The sole purpose of Kick Drop Slurpee was to make their audience laugh and the audience purposely came to laugh. Therefore, the social interaction in the audience before and during the show was completely different. Before the show, the audience talked and socialized among themselves while, during the show, individual interaction halted and all eyes were focused on the performers. Even though Americans enjoy more blue humor and racial jokes, Kick Drop Slurpee kept it clean and family friendly, just like *I Love Lucy*, and still managed to successfully entertain their audience. But whichever way we look at it, the act of laughing is always a good thing, especially since it's the best medicine out there.

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