

An Exploration of the Schema and Function of Humor

Rozel S. Balmores-Paulino*

Abstract: This paper has qualitatively examined the humor schema and humor functions of selected Filipino residents in Baguio City, Philippines by conducting Focus Group Discussions with Filipino youth, adults and elderly participants. Humor schema can be fleshed out through the cognition of humor and the affective and behavioral dimensions that are linked with it. Humor cognition is associated with the funny person as the primary humor stimulus. The notion of humor has a bias for positive emotions as the expected consequence of the humor experience. The behavioral indices of humor include laughter, specific verbal responses, and both positive and non-normative behaviors. The construal of the non-humorous or the humor threshold is based on the degree to which humor is hurtful to the other; humor is in synchrony with the humor recipient; humor incorporates novelty; the degree of closeness between the source and the recipient; and the perception and context of the recipient. The functions of humor include a mechanism for intervention in times of distress; as a shared activity in social groups and events that strengthens the social bond; as a form of communication, social commentary or forthright challenge to an authority figure; and as an inherent quality of being human.

Keywords: Filipino, schema, function, humor threshold, perception

Filipino Humor

Filipinos are anecdotally known for their ability to smile and laugh in the face of adversity. This is a popular belief about Filipinos. The history of the Filipino people has been beset by socio-economic and political crises as well as by natural and man-made disasters. Humor has been used as a social corrective in times of political turmoil and revolt as manifested in the emergences of zarzuelas during Spanish times to the publication of editorial cartoons in local newspapers at present. Alongside these external sources of difficulties are the hassles of daily life resulting in varying personal struggles.

In the face of these unfavorable circumstances both in the macro and micro levels of life,

* **Rozel S. Balmores-Paulino**, Assistant Professor at the Department of Social Anthropology and Psychology, University of the Philippines Baguio, the Philippines. rsbalmorespaulino@up.edu.ph

Filipinos have been characterized by resilience—being able to bounce back in the aftermath of adverse conditions. This is where the humor of Filipinos has been construed as a means by which the Filipinos cope. Humor may be a mechanism that allowed the Filipinos to weather the storms of life. By doing this piece of work, we unravel the validity of these attributions about Filipino humor serving as coping mechanism, among other functions.

However, as pervasive as these opinions may seem, there seems to be a dearth on local empirical work that provides support for this trait or possibly, this character strength of Filipinos. The scarce literature about the psychology of Filipino humor is the catalyst for the researcher to in fact explore this uncharted field.

This study therefore would like to seek the answers to basic questions about humor as approached from the context and experiences of Filipinos. This paper intends to examine the humor of Filipinos by looking at the schema and functions of Filipino humor. Specifically, this study aims to find out how Filipinos define humor, i.e. a humorous message/behavior and the humorous person and to surface the underlying functions that humor fulfills when Filipinos use humor.

Ancheta (2009/2010) wrote an analysis of humor in Filipino zarzuelas. In this article, Ancheta maintained that the operation of humor has served a social function in the Filipino community. To quote, “The paper aims to study the zarzuela...as an early twentieth century Filipino art form and as repository of the ways by which humor operates to engender negotiations within community...It also examines the complicity of humor in defining nation as community thereby solidifying and strengthening the nationalist struggle as one that is based, too, on local knowledge and everyday life” (Ancheta 2009/2010, p. 320).

Moreover, the relevance of humor in the Tagalog plays analyzed by Ancheta point to the capacity of humor to challenge dominant beliefs and to create a Filipino identity alongside it. These essential functions of humor can be gleaned from the objective that the paper aims to address which states that “humor in these zarzuelas as nationalist plays becomes an operating textual and cultural device that reconstitute accepted beliefs, render moot and fracture hegemonic normalcies by using comic strategies to open possibilities for deploying the comic within the nation as community, moving now to craft and define its own identity” (Ancheta 2009/2010, p. 321).

Atsushi Sudo (1995) conducted an ethnographic study of joking behavior by investigating a case in a Philippine urban community. The results of the study showed that Filipino joking behavior can be characterized as teasing whereby the aim is to laugh at the recipient of the joke and thereby provoke negative emotions in the target of the joke. Atsushi Sudo also highlights how joking

behavior serves the facilitation of efficient social relations and activities, bolstering of dissimilarities in social status and the preservation of social relations (Sudo, 1995).

Humor as Multidimensional

With the general thrust of exploring and describing the humor of Filipinos, one of the cornerstones that informed the research is the multidimensional nature of humor. Humor is far from being simple such that a researcher's mindset will always have to include a multi-layered humor landscape (Berger, 1994; Berger, 1995). For instance, there are multiple perspectives or theories in psychology that try to flesh out the nature and function of humor, including the classic explanations posed by Superiority, Incongruity and Relief-Release theories (Keith-Spiegel, 1972; Morreall, 1987).

Humor function refers to the aspect of humor that explores the reasons why humor is used by persons and groups. For instance, a researcher can think of humor functions in terms of the proposed typology namely affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive and self-defeating humor (Martin et.al. 2003 in Hampes 2006, pp. 180-181). Also, the paradoxical function of humor reverberates in the literature. Humor may serve towards the flourishing or the dissolution of relationships or it may fashion harmony or fuel discord in groups (Levine 1969, p. 1; Meyer 2000, pp. 310-321). Hence, humor can be both facilitative and inhibitive in function. Literature has also revealed that humor is both good and bad. Humor can be a virtue or strength but it can also be viewed negatively (Beerman and Ruch 2009, p. 398). This duality of humor can also be seen in the need to analyze the function of humor on the intra-psychological and the societal level (Lynch 2002, pp. 423-424).

Methodology

The study employed the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) as data gathering technique. The FGD employs a bottom-up approach of grasping what currently exists with the aim of surfacing local conceptualizations of humor and the qualitative and anecdotal aspects of humor.

Humor as a social phenomenon inevitably requires that this should be rooted in the language of a group. Thus, the study explored the psychology of humor by inquiring into the ideas and perception of participants using the local Filipino term *nakakatawa* [funny or humorous] as the key word in discovering local humor. The questions during the FGD sessions included items that referred to the humorous as *nakakatawa* and the non-humorous as *hindi nakakatawa* while the humorous person is referred to as *taong mapagpatawa*. Thus, the results from this research are

based mainly on these Filipino words.

Participants

With the thrust of exploring the psychology of humor in the Philippines, Baguio City, with its heterogenous population, was selected as an illustrative site of the research. The research was conducted by tapping participants in a selected community and in city-based organizations.

Instrument

Each FGD session began with an overview of the research and a brief personal introduction by each member of the group. Prior to the FGD proper, each session commenced with a “word-association” activity on humor. This was followed by questions on humor schema and humor function. English was used in the construction of the FGD questionnaire. However, the instruments were translated by the researcher to the Filipino language for the actual sessions as this is the language comprehensible to both the researcher and participants.

Procedure

A total of eleven Focus Group Discussions were conducted with separate groups for the youth, adults and the elderly. These sessions yielded to a total of 76 participants who joined the Focus Group Discussions with an equal number of males and females. With respect to age groups, 26 were youth (13-18 years old), 29 were adults (21-56 years old) and 21 were elderly (61-80 years old). Among the 26 youths, 14 were females while 12 were males. The 29 adults were comprised of 13 females and 16 males. Lastly, the 21 elderly were composed of 11 females and 10 males.

FGD Data Analysis Plan

The data obtained from the Focus Group Discussion were analyzed using content analysis particularly the KJ Analysis named after the Japanese proponent Kawakita Jiro (Scupin, 1997). The researcher and two other professors comprised the KJ Analysts. They were briefed about the general objective of the research before beginning the task. The task of the KJ Analysts is to reach a consensual decision for each response card with respect to the commonality of the response in relation to the other responses. Clusters are then created for similar responses. The details of the KJ Analysis procedure can be found in Appendix A.

Results

The Schema of Filipino Humor

Components of Humor

The first section is an attempt at surfacing the themes that define what is funny. Results surfaced three primary components of humor, namely the cognition of humor and the affective as well as the behavioral elements of the humor phenomenon.

Cognition of humor

Humor involves a cognitive-perceptual component, through which a humor definition can be extracted. This section explores the participants' perceptions on the person factor in a humorous exchange—the person referred to as funny, as well as the actions that are deemed comical. In unraveling their ideas about the subject matter, the results reveal aspects of the participants' humor schema.

Humor is linked to specific persons who are described as funny, clownish, “the joker” and “the comedian”. To note, the names of local and foreign celebrity icons in the field of comedy entertainment is a common response associated with *nakakatawa*. The association of humor with specific persons can also be observed from the participants' recollection of names of persons they personally know. These people seem to set a benchmark when it comes to evoking humor and laughter among their target audience.

The most dominant theme in the responses points to the idea that the funny person is a natural joker. It can be further inferred that this person has some core qualities as elaborated in the responses of the participants. In sum, the pervasive themes that characterize the funny person include the person's inherent and spontaneous comical words and actions; the perception of this person as a pleasant, happy companion with a knack for energizing a group especially in social gatherings; this person has a good grasp in communicating his/her ideas to the recipient of the humorous attempt and can be described as talkative; he can find ways to turn the events to his favor and can manage the teasing of other people and not be offended and hence, is described as a person who does not get easily affected by jokes and teasing; and lastly, this person is witty and confident.

Humor is also linked with descriptions of an individual's physical traits. The association of humor with physical traits involves attributes that highlight bodily imperfections or irregularities, handicaps, as well as unusual or unpleasant body secretions or scents. Some examples include being bald, toothless, fat or have a weird voice.

Affective component of humor

Another cluster derived from the responses is the theme that humor is associated with positive outcomes in the form of positive feelings or a break away from negative emotions. For the former, humor has also been delegated as entertaining and a source of delight and gladness among female and male elderly participants. The male elderly pointed out in the discussion how humorous attempts may induce laughter and result in positive feelings particularly the feeling of positive well being akin to when the heart feels light. Nonetheless, they say this with caution since some humorous attempts are offensive and are intentionally meant to hurt people. With regard to the latter, the female youth participants seem to think of humor as a way to escape boredom and pass the time.

Behavioral component of humor

The third component of humor includes its behavioral displays such as laughter, verbal exchanges as well as the association of humor with positive and non-normative behaviors.

Laughter is a behavioral index of humor. This theme seems to be somewhat expected since *nakakatawa* is rooted in the word laughter. Notwithstanding, this behavioral response is relevant since results reveal that any attempt at humor must in actuality register a natural belly laugh. Evoking laughter therefore seems to be the concrete, observable measure of a humorous exchange.

It should be noted however, that the behavioral displays of humor run through some continuum ranging from the smiling countenance or happy disposition to the “belly laughter” or the “laugh out loud” kinds of display. This is supported by the gradations in the words used by the participants to describe what is humorous. In line with this, the use of *natutuwa* as opposed to *natatawa* can be observed in the responses of the female adult and male elderly groups with *natutuwa* as denoting a subtler intensity of behavioral display relative to *natatawa*. Humorous exchanges could therefore evoke varying levels of behavioral responses.

Another cluster that implies the behavioral underpinning of the humor interaction directs our attention to specific verbal responses. One can observe that these words or phrases are age or generation-specific. This theme gives emphasis on local verbal responses dominantly observable from the answers of the female youths and male adults that seem to serve as acceptable ways of “getting back” at the source of a humorous communication.

Another track in this component is the notion that humor is also associated with positive

behaviors implicated in interpersonal relations. For instance, the female adults and the elderly noted that a funny person, given his/her social adroitness is a pleasant, good-natured companion. For the male adult participants, humor is viewed as being evoked by the funny person's playful and effective use of words and behaviors.

Humor is also associated with funny actions. The male elderly participants find humor in behaviors like in the way people walk and dance. For the elderly, a funny person is someone who performs silly behaviors in order to entertain people such as when a drunk person "dances" on the street. In line with this theme, the participants noted how funny actions may be associated with certain types of people. For example, participants from the youths and adults noted the behaviors of gay men and alcohol-intoxicated persons as funny.

The next cluster of responses associates humor with socially unacceptable qualities and behavior. Male youth participants noted cockiness and "weird logic" as associated with the comical while the male adult participants mentioned "asshole" and being a smart aleck as funny. The female adult participants seem to find humor in other people's behaviors that seem to be critical and intrusive in addition to people who exhibit behaviors like being so stressed and being shy. The female elderly participants also identified some labels associated with funniness such as the attention-seeker and the deceitful.

The association of humor with deviant behavior also surfaced in the results. The male youth participants link nakakatawa with insanity and drug-induced disorientation. The male adults enumerated several local labels associated with being funny that imply a person's absurdity and stupidity.

What is Funny?

Given these three components of humor, the following themes can be extracted with respect to what is funny. The notion of what is funny seems to be primarily tied in with the person stimulus—the schema of the funny person. With insights coming from their descriptions of the funny person, funny is defined as spontaneous. Hence, when the humor used is contrived, the humor is doomed to fail. Funny also appears to be defined as something playful, delightful and pleasant. This is supported by the result that humor results in positive emotions. Funny might also mean going outside the norm or expectation. Hence, the premise of what is funny is that there are some standard expectations, usually based on the lens utilized by the recipient. When the humor stimulus goes beyond the expectation, the recipient may interpret this as funny. Thus, what is funny is linked with

being different, like for instance, a person exhibiting irregular physical traits and absurd psychological attributes or behaviors.

The definition of funny entails a recognition of a continuum where both ends of the continuum represent the non-humorous—one end of the continuum represents a regular, non-offensive stimulus/message while the opposite end reflects the offensive stimulus/ message. In between, we have the humorous stimulus/message—those that we deem funny. In this part of the continuum, funny can be conceived as those stimuli/message that are natural, spontaneous, pleasant, playful and unusual.

Functions of Humor

Results reveal the functionality of humor in various ways. This section derives four major themes with respect to the opinions of the participants about the uses of humor. These include humor as a coping mechanism, as a social adhesive, as venue for social commentary and as an exercise of one's humanity.

Humor as intervention

The first theme under this category, common across the different groups in the FGD, invokes the importance of humor in the lives of the participants as a mechanism to divert stress, problems, and setbacks. The answers under this theme underlie the notion of “coping humor”, that is, humor functions as a means to manage the distress and hassles of daily life as well as the simple monotony of human existence. This theme runs through all the groups. The coping function of humor can be in the form of uplifting the spirits of a lonely person facing a problem; breaking the ice when dealing with awkward or stressful events or even the humdrum moments of life; and masking a problem by creating a humorous façade.

The function of humor as a coping defense is noted even among funny persons. To cite, the female adult and female elderly participants believe that funny people are thought of as merely concealing a problem with their jokes or they may use joking as an outlet to reveal their problems and call attention to themselves. In addition, those who tend to be humorous utilize humor even in serious and difficult times such as when dealing with anger or when people around them are sad.

Humor as social adhesive

Humor is a social activity that acts to fortify friendships. It works as the social glue in groups. Humor is inevitably a shared activity particularly among people with some degree of closeness or familiarity. Laughter done in solitary is perceived as strange. For the female youth and the male elderly participants, humor has the potential to build and maintain the relationships they have with others as well as resolve conflict and iron out misunderstandings.

The sociality of humor can also be gleaned from the consequences of humor. This theme recognizes the likely positive and negative impacts of being a funny person. A female elderly participant noted that being funny may be received negatively (such as being referred to as untrue or insincere) resulting in social embarrassment on the part of the humor initiator and eventually making the humor initiator avoid comical antics. On the other hand, a male elderly pointed out that a person's inability to laugh with others may be an easy way to gain enemies, implying the social pressure to laugh with others.

Humor as social commentary/challenging authority/acceptable way of expressing hostility

The purpose of humor is to communicate information and at times serve as a social commentary on a particular person, topic or issue. The responses of the male youth and male adults show that humor can be used in classroom situations whereby a humorous attempt can be initiated by the student to the teacher. Reading through this behavior, this may be a subtle way of challenging the authority of the teacher in the classroom setting.

Humor as a venue for acceptable expression of hostility also surfaced in the findings. For instance, discriminating a person because of his/her physical imperfections, skin color or body type by way of humor was deemed acceptable. Making fun of another person's physical attributes or attacking a person's character can be received lightly by the audience when performed in the context of a humorous exchange.

Humor as a manifestation of one's humanity

This section highlights the relevance of humor in one's life by recognizing that as persons, we have this innate capacity to manifest humor. The responses that comprise this cluster are obtained from all groups. The distinction of this section from the preceding themes rests on the acknowledgement that humor, given its intrinsic benefits, is part and parcel of human life. The previous uses of humor spring from a need to address a situation such as stress, relational conflict or a social issue. This theme, on the other hand, underlines the use of humor as stemming from the

desire to boost the ego and affirm the essence of being human. As one male youth puts it, “If no one’s there to make people laugh, you’ll just be like a robot following routines”.

Limits to humor: Factors that take the humor out of humor

The general idea behind this theme is the notion of a humor threshold—the point where beyond this, a humorous message fails to be comical and may likely be viewed unacceptable. Humor limit is an individual’s “breaking point” in humorous exchanges which may be determined on a case-to-case basis. One person’s “breaking point” for humor may be higher or lower relative to another person’s.

Findings suggest the following themes as factors that address the limits of humor—the hurtful humor, the timing and appropriateness of humor, the freshness and novelty of humor, the exclusion of certain people in humor and the receiver’s humor perception.

Hurtful to others

This theme underscores the unacceptability of the offensive, hurtful type of humor. The female elderly participants emphasize the importance of wholesome humor. This humor is described as using the right words, and having some sensible things to say. The responses obtained from the youths and the female elderly participants contend that wholesome humor promotes good feelings.

Similarly, the groups of adult and the male elderly participants maintain that the humorous attempt is perceived as lacking comical value and may be deemed as offensive relative to the appropriateness of the humor content. Humor attempt ceases being funny when the content is inappropriate, malicious and employs demeaning words. The implied humor threshold is inferred by the phrases “below the belt” such as humor described as rude or humor that touches on sensitive areas of the recipient’s life such as religion, sex and domestic life.

Among the male youths and male adults, humor involving physical contact is not funny. Jokes that are delivered in an atmosphere of bullying are detested by the participants. However, they qualified that the humorous vis-à-vis non humorous classification depends on where you are in the context of a humorous exchange. If one is the recipient of a prank, then he will perceive the humorous attempt as not funny but if one is the source or mere observer of a prank, then he might perceive the act as comical.

In the discussion sessions, the adult and female elderly participants noted that personal

accidents or misfortunes are non-humorous. For instance, witnessing a person slipping/falling on the ground is noted as not funny. In general, these participants mentioned that humor that involves poking fun at another person's mishaps are not funny. Another theme revolves around the thought that certain types of people, particularly those who may be physically, mentally or economically challenged do not deserve to be laughed at. This particular cluster is common among female elderly. However it is interesting to point out that for the male adults, laughing at another person's misadventures may invoke humor but its behavioral manifestation must remain covert.

Timing: synchrony with the other

Inappropriate timing seems to be the reason for the failure of humorous attempts. Proper timing seems to be anchored on the current situation as well as emotional state of the person receiving the humorous attempt. For instance, a humorous attempt will be viewed negatively or will be deemed futile when the recipient is expecting a serious conversation, is caught in the middle of a problem or is in a bad, non-receptive mood. Good timing, therefore, means that the humorous attempt is performed in consideration of the context of the recipient. This can be gleaned from a local folk wisdom mentioned by a female elderly, "You can pull a joke with a drunk person but never with a person who just woke up."

Freshness/novelty

The best way to kill humor is through repetitious humorous jesting. The discussion with the male adults showed that something is deemed funny when there is novelty in it. Hence, hearing the humorous message once may be interpreted as comical, however, repetition of the humorous attempt eliminates the element of surprise and unexpectedness and eventually leads instead to negative emotions, such as the feeling of irritability. Note the reaction of one of the participants: "For example, in group conversations, you were insulted by a person then everyone laughed at it. But when it happens repeatedly, it's not funny anymore. It becomes offensive."

The main ingredient of humor success is grounded on the elements of spontaneity and unexpectedness. Hence, people may engage in humor at random such as in response to situational triggers like what the female youths refer to as "moments of silence" or when some unplanned stimulus from the situation causes them to crack jokes.

Exclusion of certain people

Humor is viewed as dependent on the degree of relationship between the source and recipient of humor. Humor boundaries are set based on the current relationship of those people involved in the humorous exchange. The closeness of the relationship between the source and recipient of humor may have repercussions on the perception of humor. For instance, in the discussion of the female youth participants, “inside jokes” are anchored on this exclusion-inclusion dimension: “When you know with whom you crack your jokes, and, in a way, you know the boundaries or the limits of what is and what is not funny...For instance, if you are close to your audience, you have these inside jokes that can only be understood among yourselves.”

Perception of humor recipient

This particular theme notes that the comical value of a humorous communication primarily relies on the recipient’s perception of the humorous message and the humor source. Take for instance the supporting statements of one of the participants: “For me, what’s funny lie in the mind of the person laughing. I cannot really control it. I won’t know whether you are entertained or irritated. It’s the way it is. If you’re trying to be funny, there would be people who would laugh and those who would not.”

This invokes the power of perception particularly of the humor recipient’s perception in predicting the success or failure of a humorous attempt. In a nutshell, humor may be interpreted as funny or otherwise relative to the background and context of the recipient. The receiver of humor is an individual with his/her own attributes and biases. For instance, appreciation of certain types or content of humor may be bound by the age or generation of the receiver.

Discussion

The findings from the FGDs across the research questions on humor schema and humor function reveal themes that seem to surface more dominantly than others with respect to humor. The person stimulus as source plays a primary role in humor perception, whereby the schema of the “funny person” as essential, echoes through in the responses of the participants in the different research questions. In relation to this, the physical attributes of the funny person seem to be a prominent theme as well. This leads us to place the funny person as a central force in the humor dynamics. Paul McGhee’s (1979) model of the basic characteristics of humor is a useful explanatory framework in understanding these findings.

McGhee explicates the model by discussing the prevalent slants in studying humor—that is the psychological views of the basic characteristics of humor. He maintains that the various psychological studies that examined humor can be classified according to its emphasis on six basic characteristics namely stimulus, cognitive, physiological, psychodynamic, overt behavioral and social characteristics. In this study, the stimulus characteristics stood out among the six basic characteristics of humor. Thus, the qualities imbued on the “funny person” provide support for the stimulus characteristics inherent in the humor dynamics.

Results show that humor dynamics is about observing proper timing, which entails being sensitive to the personal context of the recipients. The importance of novelty in humor was also recognized in the results. We find confirmation for the Surprise theory as the theme of “unexpectedness” is highlighted in the responses of the participants. Parallel to this, a humorous attempt loses its comical value when repetitious jesting is used. Surprise theories give premium on the experience of “suddenness” and novelty as the prerequisite ingredient in the appreciation of humor. This cluster of theories is closely linked with Incongruity theories because “both involve an instantaneous breaking up of the routine course of thought or action” (Keith-Spiegel, 1972, p. 9).

The results reveal the association of laughter, the verbal and the positive and negative behavior with humor which provides support to McGhee’s (1979) model as well as Martin’s (2006) definition that humor includes a behavioral dimension. There has been particular interest in laughter and smiling as concrete measures of the humor experience, whereby the intensity of humor appreciation is viewed as related to the intensity of the manifestations of these observable behavioral measures (McGhee, 1979, pp. 24-25).

Findings from the study regarding humor function provide support for the perspective forwarded by Lynch (2002) noting how humor serves both individual/psychological and social purposes. Lynch presents a clear-cut distinction in the written materials on humor—that is, literature that place premium on the individual level on one hand and the societal level on the other. The former refers to the motivational and psychological reasons behind a person’s use of humor while the latter pertains to the social functions of humor. (Lynch, 2002, pp. 423-424).

The results showing that humor is a coping mechanism as well as a venue for self-expression of one’s humanity provide support for Lynch’s psychological purposes of humor. Meanwhile, the findings that humor is used as a social commentary as well as a group’s social glue provide support for Lynch’s social functions of humor.

Humor is a form of intervention and is often utilized, not as a way to provide a solution for a

problem but more as a breather to enable a person to move on from a difficult situation. This thus bolsters the premise of Release and Relief theories that humor is a mechanism of releasing the accumulated strain in the face of problems and tedious situations. Release and Relief theories begin with the premise of the existence of “excess energy” within the person. This plethora of energy results to tension in the person. Humor then functions as a mechanism by which the brimming tension is released and consequently provides relief to the person (Keith-Spiegel, 1972, p. 10).

The “existential” function of humor implies that humor is an inherent quality of being human and as a mechanism to further validate one’s being. Humor is something innate in persons and in effect conceived as an inevitable manifestation of being human. This result validates the Biological/Instinct theory which maintains that humor and laughter are inherent, instinctive human problems that fulfill a survival function leading to the perpetuation of the human species. These are manifested early in life and are not bound by culture. Ultimately, this brand of theories acknowledges the functional aspects of humor and laughter. For instance, laughter and humor have been deemed as facilitators of a sound physical health (Keith-Spiegel, 1972, p. 5).

At the same time, this theme also supports the notion of humor as character strength in the area of Positive psychology. In the article by Beerman and Ruch, they maintained that, in the context of Positive Psychology, humor is considered a valid interest of study specifically by naming humor as one of the character strengths. The relevance of humor is further affirmed as it is viewed as having a strong association with life satisfaction (Beerman&Ruch, 2009, p. 396).

Paul McGhee’s (1979) model on the basic characteristics of humor is also a useful explanatory framework in understanding the findings that suggest humor’s capacity to build and strengthen human relations. McGhee proposes social characteristics as one of the basic characteristics of humor. According to Bergson, this dimension gives emphasis on the social functions that humor fulfills such that Bergson claims that “to understand laughter, we must put it back into its natural environment, which is society, and above all must we determine the unity of its function, which is a social one” (Bergson, 1911 in McGhee, 1979, p. 27). From a sociological perspective, Middleton and Moland maintained that the attention of humor studies can be subsumed in three areas—“as an index of intergroup conflict, as a means of controlling intragroup behavior and maintaining a sense of solidarity and intimacy within the group and as a joking relationship” (Middleton and Moland 1959 in McGhee, 1979, p. 28), Martineau also dwelled on the social functions of humor maintaining that these functions would vary relative to whether humor takes place within the group or between groups (Martineau in McGhee, 1979, pp. 28-29).

The results also surfaced the function of humor as a form of social commentary on current issues. These jokes are meant to make a point or opinion about social circumstances and behavior which also supports the Superiority framework's notion of humor as a social corrective. Superiority theories reflect the presence of some hierarchical relationship in the process of using humor for it entails comparing others to ourselves. In such comparison, the inferior qualities and subordinate position of the other relative to the self are noted. Hence in this strain of theories, mockery and ridicule are inevitable in humor (Keith-Spiegel, 1972, p. 6). Superiority theories may also address a particular social function. For instance, Bergson (1911) "viewed humor as a punishment inflicted on unsocial persons. Thus, humiliation becomes a social corrective" (Keith-Spiegel, 1972 p. 7).

This link between humor and social protest as noted in Hart's account is also useful in explaining the result that humor is useful in social dissent and for challenging the status quo: "Often, humor furthered the development of the collective identity of a social movement, whereas in several cases humour acted as a powerful communication tool, serving as a true 'weapon of the weak'" (Hart, 2007, p. 1).

The humor recipient plays an important role in the judgment of humor. A core finding in the study is the crucial role of the recipient's perception in filtering and evaluating the various aspects of the humor employed. It appears in the results that the target audience has the central role in humor perception as the various aspects of humor factors (such as the funny person stimulus) are filtered through the experiences and judgment of the recipient.

Findings from the study suggest that a fuller picture of the humor can be rooted from an understanding of the humor recipient. The humor recipient's profile and qualities all come into play as we attempt to gain a more accurate picture of the humor threshold. The humor recipient is the fulcrum to which the humor stimulus is weighed and judged accordingly. Thus, the success of a humorous attempt primarily resides in the humor recipient. From this study, several aspects about the recipient are deemed crucial. These include the recipient's degree of tolerance for joking or teasing or being slow or quick in getting the comicality out of the humorous message. Humor may be interpreted as funny or otherwise relative to the background and context of the recipient. For instance, demographic factors like age, cohort/generation or gender of the humor recipient can explain how certain types or content of humor may be bound by these variables. The transient states, such as the current state of mind and emotion of the recipient, the social context of the recipient and the particular opinions that the recipient hold may interact with the recipient's humor judgment. The power of the humor recipient's perception in predicting the success or failure of a

humorous attempt is well-emphasized in the results.

These factors could be thought of as interacting proximal factors which influence our evaluation of humor, i.e., there is the possibility of the mutual inclusion or overlapping impact of any or all of these factors. One interaction that surfaced in the study is between the humor source and the humor recipient, where the degree of relationship existing between the two acts as a guide for a person's humor judgment.

The comprehension of the intricacies of a humorous display will only be accomplished by linking it back to the language used in a specified socio-cultural context. Enriquez states "language, being humanity's primary medium of thought and feeling is an indispensable tool in probing deep into the behaviour and actions of a people" (Enriquez 1994, p. 10). It is important to recognize therefore that a humorous exchange is bound by the language used in the group which is not only cultural in character but also constrained by the cohort/generation of the people engaged in the exchange. Thus, this study provides support to Enriquez and Marcelino's (1984) position regarding the incontestable influence of language: "Language is not a neutral system of signs nor is it value-free, as each language invariably reflects the values, perspectives and rules of cognition of a particular class or society" (Enriquez and Marcelino 1984 cited in Enriquez 1994, p. 9). The comical value of a humorous remark depends on the accuracy of our understanding of the language and the nuances of the culture context.

The Humor threshold

A relevant construct that this research has surfaced is the concept of a humor threshold described earlier in the text as the point where beyond this, a humorous message fails to be comical and may likely be viewed unacceptable. Threshold is defined as "a statistically determined point on a stimulus continuum at which there is a transition in a series of sensations or judgments" (Chaplin 1985, p. 469). This definition provides us two key features of the humor threshold. Given a humor stimulus, the notion of the humor threshold can be viewed as a continuum with opposing poles—from the non-humorous to the most humorous and in between are points of varying levels of humorousness. The second point from the definition presents the possibility of quantitatively measuring the humor threshold.

This concept may initially be thought of as having an arbitrary boundary. However, this concept makes more sense as we link this with the assessment of humor appropriateness relative to the humor recipients' personal and social contexts. In general, the primary factor that defines a

person's humor threshold is proper timing. Humor threshold therefore may be linked with the recipient's mood for humor at a given moment and the present situational context where the humorous attempt will be witnessed.

Humor threshold may also refer to an individual's "breaking point" in humorous exchanges which may be a function of individual idiosyncracies in humor. One person's "breaking point" for humor may therefore be shorter or longer relative to another person's. This "humor limit" may also be a function of the existing degree of closeness and familiarity between the people involved in a humorous exchange. Thus the humor threshold of a person may become higher or lower relative to the relational context of the humor initiator and humor recipient.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the humor of selected Filipino residents in Baguio City, Philippines by exploring their perceptions on the schema and functions of humor. In review, this endeavor has sought to define humor by distinguishing the humorous from the non-humorous and particularly unraveling the aspects that describe the humorous person and to surface the functions that humor fulfills.

In this endeavor we surfaced that humor schema is comprised of multiple components. As revealed in the findings, humor can be fleshed out by surfacing the cognition of humor as well as the affective and behavioral dimensions that are linked with it. Humor cognition is inevitably associated with the funny person as the primary humor stimulus. The benchmarks of the funny person are popular comedy icons, on one hand, and specific persons the participants know on a personal basis, on the other. Further, the construal of what is humorous is based on specific psychological characteristics and physical attributes of the funny person. The notion of humor is also connected to the emotional impact of the humorous attempt on the target recipient, with a strong bias for positive emotions as the expected consequence of the humor experience. Lastly, the behavioral indices of humor include laughter, specific verbal responses as well as both positive and non-normative or negative behaviors.

The humor schema is further explored by unraveling the notions of what is not humorous. Results show that the construal of the non-humorous is based on the degree to which humor is hurtful to the other; the level to which the humor is in synchrony with the target humor recipient; the extent to which the humor incorporates novelty or surprise; the degree of closeness between the source and the recipient which implies the exclusivity of humor; and the perception of the recipient

as influenced by the recipients' current state or background. Hence, in view of a fuller construal of the parameters of the humorous, this study shows that factors that comprise the non-humorous—variables that define the humor threshold, must also be unraveled.

The results of this research unraveled the following functions of humor. Humor is used as a mechanism for intervention in times of distress; as a shared activity in social groups and events that strengthens the social bond; as a form of communication—transmitting harmless information on one hand, or at times, serving as a social commentary or a forthright challenge to an authority figure, on the other; and as an exercise of being human, thereby recognizing humor as an inherent quality of persons.

Research on the Psychology of Filipino: A Work in Progress

The present endeavor has ventured into an exploration of humor psychology. In the context of the results arising from this study, below are several suggestions for future work.

Future studies can pay closer attention to the concept of the “natural jokers” in our social interaction and groups. This may entail generating a profile of this type of individuals while systematically documenting their core qualities and traits as well as contextualizing the “funny” personality profile through life narratives.

Another concept that may also deserve a more focused research agenda would be the notion of a humor threshold. It appears that there are limits, a system of rules in these humorous exchanges— a thin line that differentiates the humorous from the non-humorous. It would be interesting to dwell on this idea and unravel the rules that will concretely operationalize this seemingly arbitrary humor threshold.

It is clear that humor is rooted in language, thus, in order to further our understanding of home-grown humor, there is a need to identify the peculiarities of humor across different ethnolinguistic groups by expanding the studies to various ethnolinguistic groups and regions in the Philippines. These studies can be the springboard for discovering the underlying thread that weaves through the various dimensions of humor, explicating more fully the nuances of Filipino humor and contributing to global concepts grounded on local experience.

APPENDIX A

The KJ Analysis Procedure:

1. **Sorting and Coding.** The researcher sorts the transcriptions of the FGD sessions according to the FGD guide questions. The verbatim responses for each of the questions were grouped and coded further according to the demographic variables of age and gender (e.g. responses for research question X will be coded accordingly as female youth, male youth, female adult, male adult, female senior citizen and male senior citizen.) The coding were done for all research questions.
2. **Collating.** The researcher transfers the coded data to individual cards. The cards are placed in separate envelopes signifying each research question.
3. **Scheduling.** The researcher finalizes the schedule and venue of the KJ Analysis sessions according to the availability of all the KJ Analysts.
4. **Presenting.** During each session, the researcher introduces the research question to which the responses will be based on and reads each response card included in the research question at hand.
5. **Clustering.** The task of the KJ Analysts is to reach a consensual decision for each response card with respect to the commonality of the response in relation to the other responses. Clusters are then created for similar responses. When consensus is not reached for a card, that particular response will be set aside first to allow the analysts to move on to the next response cards. The analysts will return to this item after all responses have been sorted.
6. **Labeling.** Once all response cards have been read and sorted, the group will label every cluster formed for the particular research question.
7. **Summarizing.** The researcher will summarize the output for the research question.
8. This procedure continues until all research questions have been covered.

References

- Ancheta, Maria Rhodora G. 2009/2010. "Humor as Sedition/Seduction: Humor and Communitas in the Filipino Zarzuelas". *Philippine Humanities Review*, 11/12, 320-358.
- Beerman, Ursula and Ruch, Willibald. 2009. "How Virtuous is Humor? Evidence from Everyday Behavior". *Humor*, 22 (4), 395-417.
- Berger, Arthur Asa. 1994. "No Laughing Matter: Eight Scholars in Search of a Joke". *Et cetera* Spring, 29-35.
- Berger, Arthur Asa. 1995. *Blind Men and Elephants: Perspectives on Humor*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Chaplin, James P. 1985. *Dictionary of Psychology*. New York: Dell Publishing.
- Enriquez, Virgilio G. 1994. *Pagbabangong Dangal: Indigenous Psychology and Cultural Empowerment*. Quezon City: Akademya ng Kultura at Sikolohiyang Pilipino.
- Hampes, William. 2006. "Humor and Shyness: The Relation between Humor Styles and Shyness". *Humor*, 19 (2), 179-187.
- Hart, Marjolein't. 2007. An Introduction. In Marjolein't Hart and Dennis Bos (eds.), *Humor and Social Protest*. 1-20. Cambridge: Cambriige University Press.
- Keith-Spiegel, Patricia. 1972. Early Conceptions of Humor: Varieties and Issues. In Jeffrey H. Goldstein and Paul McGhee (eds.), *The Psychology of Humor: Theoretical perspectives and Empirical Issues*, 5-13. New York and London: Academic Press.
- Levine, Jacob (ed.). 1969. *Motivation in Humor*. New York: Atherton Press.
- Lynch, Owen H. 2002. "Humorous Communication: Finding a Place for Humor in Communication". *Israeli Journal for Humor Research*, December 2018, Vol. 7 Issue No. 2

- Research". *Communication Theory*, 12 (4), 423-445
- Martin, Rod A. 2006. *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach*. Burlington: Elsevier Academic Press.
- McGhee, Paul E. 1979. *Humor: Its Origin and Development*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman.
- Meyer, John C. 2000. "Humor as a Double-Edged Sword: Four Functions of Humor in Communication". *Communication Theory*, 10 (3), 310-331.
- Morreall, John (ed.). 1987. *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Scupin, Raymond. 1997. The KJ Method: A Technique for analyzing data derived from Japanese ethnology. *Human Organization*, 56 (2), 233-237.
- Sudo, Atsushi. 1995. *An Ethnographic Study of Joking Behavior in a Philippine Urban Community*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Diliman MA thesis.