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An Exploratory Study of the Social Function
of Humour in an EDPS 671 Self-Study Group

BY

Robert Andrew Johnston

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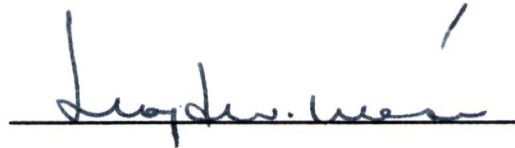
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "An Exploratory Study of the Social Function of Humour in an EDPS 671 Self-Study Group," submitted by Robert Andrew Johnston in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science.



Lloyd W. West, Ph. D., Supervisor
Department of Educational Psychology



Sharon E. Robertson, Ph. D.
Department of Educational Psychology



Paul R. Adams, Ed. D.
Department of Educational Policy and
Administrative Studies

Date May 15, 1987

ABSTRACT

Although counsellors have long recognized the importance of humour as a variable in the counselling process, scant attention has been given to researching the topic. The paucity of research interest is especially evident for the subject of humour in group counselling. The focus of this study was the social function of humour in group settings. More specifically, this research investigated the effects of humour on the task and maintenance functions of a single self-study laboratory group of graduate students in a class on group processes.

The method used to conduct the study involved the definition and classification of "humorous episodes." A humorous episode was operationally defined as any situation or event which elicits the shared laughter of two or more group members. A taxonomy of eight humour types was developed based on the manifest impact of humour upon group function. The humour types were then theoretically rank ordered according to their presumed contribution to group development. Video-taped recordings of the group for all ten sessions were observed by the researcher and humorous episodes were identified, numbered, and classified according to the humour typology. The video-taped recordings and materials were then given to three trained observers who independently classified each of the identified humorous episodes according to humour type. The most agreed upon classification for each humorous episode

comprised the data used in the analysis of observations. The analysis of group humour was based on the observed frequency of humour type and the positive impact on group function over the life span of the group, sessions, developmental issues, and quarters of sessions.

The results of this investigation suggest that humour plays a pervasive role in the dynamics of self-study groups. It further suggests that most humorous episodes observed in a self-study group will have a positive effect on group development and will serve to facilitate either one or both of the task achievement and maintenance functions of the group.

In conclusion, the study suggests that the effects of humour on group function is a topic in need of further research and it provides a method and hypotheses upon which such investigations might be founded.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In a society where personal effectiveness requires an ability to adapt to a wide range of interpersonal experiences, the inclusion of a healthy sense of humour in one's repertoire of social skills is a necessity which is often taken for granted. Rare is the person in which this gift is totally absent, but equally few are those who can at any point in time, grasp and effectively incorporate humour to the benefit of the situation. Due to its elusive nature, the essence of the humorous episode is often lost under the focus of the microscope. Descriptive attempts are usually confronted with the paradox of a seemingly simple occurrence turning out to be a profusion of inter-related possibilities. Humour has been described as one of the most complex psychic acts (Bergler, 1956), the sine qua non of civilized humankind (Schwarz, 1974), and the most common form of human expression (Roberts & Johnson, 1957).

The inherent difficulties of the topic have not deterred its consideration by inquisitive writers of philosophy, literature, and later psychology. Recorded speculations focusing on the nature of humour and laughter indicate that the phenomenon has intrigued and inspired thinkers since the time of the ancient Greek philosophers. For Plato, laughter was the malevolent revelry over the misfortunes of others, while Aristotle viewed the ludicrous as a component of the ugly or the defective (cited in Boston, 1974). An implicit

understanding of the comical is evident in the works of Wm. Shakespeare. Freud (1928) considered humour to be a significant mechanism in the adaptive defense of the ego. Rapp (1947) notes that in spite of a vast collection of theoretical and descriptive contributions, the topic has eluded a generally accepted explanation. A perusal of the more recent literature suggests that Rapp's observation is still valid today. The absence of theoretical agreement is more a reflection of the complexity of the subject matter than an indication of its importance in the realm of interpersonal relationships. In a society that spends a large portion of its resources to make itself laugh (Davis & Farina 1970), the consideration of humour and laughter as a pervasive component of human dialogue remains an important and interesting enterprise. Humour is a social phenomenon. Laughter must be shared, it always involves an element of reciprocity, and it typically functions within a communicative relationship (Coser, 1959). It is a cohesive force which facilitates not only the formation of relationships (Levine, 1969), but also their maintenance and enhancement. As a type of communication, the natural and spontaneous occurrence of humour and laughter serves important social functions.

One would expect that the discipline of Psychology and more specifically the field of Counselling, might have explored and employed humour as a significant component of the interactive process. Although its facilitative utility has long been recognized and employed by practitioners on a non-systematic basis

(Klein,1976), the topic has received so little research attention that much of what has been said remains conjecture (Foster & Reid,1983). Discussions focusing on humour and laughter are not usually found in psychology textbooks (Browning,1977). Few articles have been written about humour in counselling journals (Cassell,1974) and few if any counsellor training programs ever mention its use as a viable counselling technique (Huber,1978). Both practitioner and researcher have paid scant attention to the role of humour in groups (Bloch, Browning, & McGrath, 1983) and attempts to study its occurrence within this social context have been minimal.

A rather widespread belief that human nature is perfectable, apparently has resulted in the loss of capacity to laugh at human foibles. Yet homosapiens must laugh. It has even been suggested that an inability to live without comedy has created the need for the modern institution of counselling (Klein, 1974). Considering then, the critical role that humour might play in promoting psychological health or human adjustment, the conspicuous paucity of a counselling literature on humour is a surprising situation which invites immediate attention.

In recognition of the relevance and timeliness of the topic, humour, and especially humour in group settings was made the focus of the present study. More specifically, this research is an investigation into the effects of humour on the task and maintenance functions of a single group--a self-study laboratory group of a graduate class in group processes. The study is exploratory,

naturalistic, descriptive, and analytic. Its purpose is not to test hypotheses, but rather to generate hypotheses which warrant further research attention.

CHAPTER TWO

SURVEY OF RELATED LITERATURE

Chapter 1 provided a brief introduction to the nature of humour and its importance in human interaction. Chapter 2 will review the theory and research relevant to this subject area. The first section will present a historical overview of the terms 'humour', 'wit', and 'laughter' and present a survey of various models and theories of humour and laughter. This will be followed by a discussion of the status of humour in counselling. The final section of this chapter deals with theory and research relating to humour and laughter as it is found in the group setting.

Humour, Wit, and Laughter: A Historical Overview

The word 'humour' (as noted by McGhee, 1979) had its beginnings as the Latin term for fluid or moisture. Ancient physiology had proposed the existence of four primary, corporeal humours or fluids. During the Middle Ages, these bodily secretions were thought to determine a person's temperament or general disposition. Moreover, a balance between the humours was presumed to result in a 'normal' disposition, and the people who achieved this balance were said to be "in good humour." It will be noted that the referent of humour has shifted from a purely physical to a psychological attribute.

It was not until 1682 that the term 'humour' assumed its current meaning, namely: "that quality of action, speech, or writing , which

excites amusement; oddity, jocularly, facetiousness, comicality, fun, (and) the faculty of perceiving what is ludicrous or amusing, or of expressing it in speech, writing, or other composition; jocose imagination or treatment of a subject " (Gruner, 1978, p. 94). From its archaic origins, humour has come to refer to, "a specific mood, or disposition characterized by a sensitivity to, or appreciation of, ludicrous, absurd, incongruous, or comical events (McGhee, 1979).

The modern meaning of the word 'wit' evolved from its original signification of having to do with the mind, intellect, and the faculty of reason. The present understanding denotes mental adeptness and the ability to express things in a creative and amusing manner. The distinction made between humour and wit in the Oxford English Dictionary suggests that kindliness, geniality, sometimes even pathos connote humour, whereas wit is associated with remarks which are quick, sharp, spontaneous, and often sarcastic. Wit concerns itself with complex relations and contains an element of surprise. For Freud (1905), the purpose of wit is to afford gratification or in the process provide an outlet for aggression, while the pleasure of humour comes from a savings in the expenditure of affect. Wit is historically associated with the intellect while humour has been conceptually understood as the more 'emotional' activity (Gruner, 1978).

Laughter, as an observable physical act, has been generally described as consisting of "the spasmodic expulsions of breath, with the quick, jerky, inarticulate sounds, accompanied by characteristic

movements of the facial muscles, and brightness of the eyes" (Hertzler, 1970, p.41). Laughter also serves as a conveyer of emotional states. As an overt behavioural characteristic, the act of laughing has been assumed to be a reliable indication that a person has experienced something perceived as humorous. It is presumed that if a situation is perceived as humorous, then the behavioural effect will likely be the act or performance of laughter. Hertzler (1970) suggests that laughter as an expression of inner states, may spring forth from delight, amusement, surprise, or incredulity.

Some writers (Giles & Oxford, 1970; McGhee, 1979) note the possible hazards in assuming an isometric relationship between the experience of humour, and the laughter response in all situations. Although humour may be considered the most likely, it should be noted that there are other possible sources of laughter. For example, the laughter of self-assurance, embarrassment and nervousness may occur in some circumstances. It can be argued, however, that in most contexts laughter remains a useful and unobtrusive indicator of the possible occurrence of humour.

Most writers seem to accept, at least implicitly, definitions resembling those offered above. Indeed, so prevalent is the assumption of a common understanding of the notion of humour that many writers omit formal definitions from their discussion. Dissimilarities in theoretical opinion are evident not so much in the discussion of what humour is per se, but in speculations as to the circumstances under which humour occurs. The following survey of

various models and theories of humour is illustrative of these conceptual differences.

Models and Theories of Humour

This section includes a discussion of the three major psychological models that have been used to explain the phenomenon of humour (Hickson, 1977). Assumptions made by these models about the nature of humour are stated followed by a presentation of theories which exemplify the specific models.

The Psychoanalytic Perspective

Freud's recognition that humorous episodes frequently occurred in his patient's dreams resulted in his writing two seminal articles, Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious (1905), and Humour (1928). It was Freud's thinking that spawned much of the research interest on humour appreciation and response. The psychoanalytic stance considers the humour response to be a saving of energy brought about either by temporary regression to a childish mode of thought, or by a reduction in the amount of energy normally required for maintenance of defenses against repressed desires and impulses. Humour involves an economy in the expenditure of affect as the presentation of an event perceived as having the potential to cause suffering, is revealed as being innocuous (Keith-Spiegle, 1972). The pleasure derived from wit comes from temporarily surmounting the social restrictions of the super-ego through the expression of

inhibited tendencies. This may occur through the enjoyment of childishness and non-sense, or through the acting out of regressive infantile sexual and aggressive behaviour. The result is the release of pent-up psychic energy in a socially acceptable form. Humour is a basic adjustment device equivalent to a defense mechanism like the neuroses and psychoses, albeit serving a positive, adaptive function to the individual.

Psychoanalytic theorists view humour as bypassing social restrictions through the release of regressive infantile and aggressive tendencies. Freud (1928) described the phenomenon as the 'triumph of narcissism' in that humour signifies the assertion of the pleasure-principle in the face of adverse and real circumstances. Other psychoanalytic theorists (Bergler, 1937, 1956; Kris, 1938; & Grotjahn, 1957) have elaborated the original postulates of the Freudian doctrine.

Superiority theorists suggest that humour is derived from the perception of the superiority of oneself to others. Fundamental to the situation are the notions of superiority, mockery, ridicule, and laughter as one is favourably compared to others.

While Plato focused upon laughter as a malicious and aggressive gloating over others, Hobbes took the notion of superiority a step further and describes laughter as the grimace resulting from the sudden glory of making a favourable comparison of oneself against another's infirmities (cited in Boston, 1974).

From a somewhat broader perspective, Carpenter (1922)

considers laughter to be a glory in sanity, its occasion permitting the recognition and celebration of one's own good sense.

The Drive-Reduction Model

The drive-reduction framework is founded on classical behaviour theory and resembles the psychoanalytic model. Humour is interpreted as a tension or anxiety-reducing device which is experienced as pleasurable because it temporarily satisfies the primary drives of sex and aggression. The humour response is initiated by an 'arousal state' involving some sense of discomfort or uncertainty. This is followed by the sudden release of tension due to a resolution factor. It is suggested that the enjoyment of humour becomes secondary reinforcement in its reduction of these drives. Theories which emphasize stimulus-response concepts such as learning theory are also included under the drive-reduction rubric.

Ambivalence theorists consider the humorous context to be the simultaneous occurrence of incompatible emotions. Laughter occurs when one experiences the inner tension of opposite emotions struggling for mastery (Monro, 1951). Joubert (cited in Eastman, 1921) suggests that the source of laughter is the oscillation of opposing tendencies toward joy and sorrow.

The release or relief theorists portray humour as dependent on the relief experienced through the release of excess energy or tension. Gregory (1924) claims that relief is the original source and foundational element of all varieties of laughter. Spencer (cited in

Greig, 1923)) proposes that 'purposeless nervous energy' will seek an outlet where there is the least amount of resistance.

Biological, instinct, and evolutionary theorists hold the common notion that the potentials for humour and laughter are 'built-in' to our biological system and ultimately perform an adaptive function. Since the principal physiological aspect in laughter is the diaphragm, the behaviour is nature's compensation for the diminution of organic friction due to our walking in an upright position (Walsh, 1928). It is speculated that humour is a modern remnant of the ancestral joy of conquest (Augier, cited in Diserens, 1926). Crile (1916) proposes that tickling is a recapitulation of aboriginal struggles against attack to vulnerable parts. The laughter which results is a reaction to the need to vent surplus energy and a substitution for defense against injury.

The Cognitive-Perceptual Model

According to the cognitive-perceptual model the basis for humour is in the cognitive resolution of an incongruity or paradox. Humour is manifested as insight through perceiving the juxtaposition of previously held incompatibilities in the form of new relationships. Described in the terminology of gestalt psychology, gratification is derived from the sudden discernment of the 'figure from the ground.' The resolution or 'punch-line' of a joke suddenly and unexpectedly transforms the background information into a perspective previously unconsidered. Fundamental characteristics of this humour model are

the notions of cognitive restructure and surprise.

Incongruity theorists consider humour to be the result of perceiving unlikely combinations of ideas or situations. Humour is found in uncommon combinations of relationships and the resulting sense of 'contrariety' (Gerard, cited in Greig, 1923). Much later, Koestler (1964) similarly describes the humour pattern as the integration of two usually incompatible contexts. Laughter is the mental state arising from the abrupt transformation of a strained expectation into nothing (Kant, cited in Shurcliff, 1968). Bergson (1911) suggests that humour is the comical result which occurs when that which is living, behaves incongruously in a mechanical and automatic way. For Leacock (1935) humour is the result when one perceives the contrast between what is or ought to be, and what something ought not to be.

Surprise theorists consider an element of suddenness or unexpectedness to be necessary although not sufficient for humour to occur. Keith-Spiegel (1972) notes that theorists frequently explain humour using both surprise and incongruity concepts since the notion of a sudden rearrangement of a routine course of thought or action is common to both. Descartes (cited in Greig, 1923) suggests that laughter is the result of combining joy with hate or surprise. Willmann (1940) couples this idea of alarm with an inducement to play.

Configurational theorists view humour as occurring when one perceives the sudden falling into place of previously unrelated

elements. This framework is similar to the perspective taken by incongruity theorists, however, incongruity theory finds humour in the perception of 'disjointedness', while the configurational perspective locates it in the resolution of incompatibilities. The tenets of Gestalt psychology are evident in the configurational framework. Bateson (1953) suggests that joke appreciation is analogous to the discernment of perceptual figure-ground shifts.

Humour in Counselling

The use of humour as a counselling tool has historically been discouraged. More recent research suggests that the merits of humour in the counselling process are being reconsidered. Within the Freudian tradition, analyst initiated humour has been considered destructive and demeaning to the patient in that it represents thinly-veiled aggression (Schimel, 1978). Traditionalists claim that humour jeopardizes both the authority and credibility of the 'neutral' therapist and hence, the essential development of transference. Greenwald (1975) suggests however, that humour can be effectively used to promote transference. Bloomfield (1980) proposes that the reasons for the scarcity of work on humour in therapy are due to the forementioned psychoanalytical tradition, the spontaneity and difficulty in recalling what evoked specific incidences of humour, and the notion that communication via humour is through a quick and immediate interaction of the counsellor/counsee unconscious modes. Practical experience,

however, suggests that humour is an important variable in the counselling process.

The uses of humour in the counselling relationship have been organized by Hickson (1977) under four broad categories; as a diagnostic tool, in fostering the counselling relationship, in overcoming client resistance, and as a catalyst toward client insight.

As a diagnostic device, Freud used humour like parapraxis, as an aid to understanding unconscious motivation. Humour can be an important tool in monitoring, diagnosing, and evaluating client change (Cassell, 1974). The appreciation or non-appreciation of humour can be used to evaluate the client's dynamic state and provide clues to repression and the nature of the anxiety (Hickson, 1977).

Humour can also function to foster the counsellor/counselee relationship. As an ice breaker in an initial interview, it has even been suggested that humour based rapport will advance faster than that based on empathy (Klein, 1976). Albeit at odds with the traditional psychoanalytic approach, humour functions to make the counsellor appear more human and less idealized (Bloomfield, 1980). As counsellors take the risk of appearing fallable and imperfect, clients realize that they too are inherently human (Roncoli, 1974). Later in the counselling process, humour can facilitate the difficult communication of more serious aspect of the client's situation (Porter, 1950).

Humour can also be used in counselling to overcome client resistance. When used as a metaphorical intervention, humour can cut through denial and the client's manipulative use of affect (Schimmel, 1978). When encountering indifference and discouragement humour can be helpful in lifting depressed mood states (Prerost, 1983). Humour can also be used to overcome resistance and to broach sensitive and embarrassing material.

The fourth facilitative function of humour is as a corrective experience and catalyst for client insight. Roncoli (1974) proposes the use of 'bantering', described as the humorous exaggeration of the client's disruptive behaviour aimed at corrective insight. The counsellor is perceived as both a benevolent and ridiculing authority. Humour thus helps counselees to see additional perspectives on their situation, helps them feel they have some control over their problems, and through the modelling of the counsellor, assists them in rebuilding their own sense of humour (Olson, 1976). Insight is gained through the recognition of absurdity, the mastering of anxiety, and the putting of issues into perspective (Bloomfield, 1980). It is suggested that emotional disturbance is largely due to exaggerating the significance of life events (Ellis, 1977). Humour therefore, can be used to combat an over serious attitude. Rational-Emotive-Therapy makes use of humour to dramatically distinguish between 'truths' and falsehoods. Ultimately, faulty core values are changed through the reduction of irrational beliefs to absurdity (Corsini, 1984). This approach has also been a useful

educational technique for rehearsing problem situations and for preparing the counsellee with future coping strategies (Shaughnessy, 1981). The preceding proposals for the facilitative use of humour in counselling are qualified with prerequisite conditions.

Hickson (1977) offers four main objections to the use of humour in counselling; the potential for counsellor humour to, reflect aggression, promote inappropriate joking at serious matters, reinforce a maladaptive defense strategy, and undermine the counsellor's credibility.

There is the fear that humour may, as Freud initially suggested, be an aggressive, exploitative outlet for the counsellor. Humour should not be used at the client's expense, and only after trust has been established in the relationship does the use of humour increase the likelihood of positive results. Humour must be used with skill, sensitivity, and never at the expense of the client (Olson, 1976). Humour in counselling should focus on the foibles of people in general instead of taking the risk of hurting one person in particular.

A second major objection is that counsellor humour may prevent client spontaneity and promote joking at serious matters. Porter (1950) states that humour should not be contrary to the feeling tone of the session at the time. The counsellor's inappropriate use of humour may be a sign of an inability to work with stress (Dewane, 1978) or the attempt to curry the client's favour (Porter, 1950).

A further objection is that when counsellors encourage humour,

they may be reinforcing a maladaptive defense strategy. While Cassell (1974) views a humorous attitude as a mechanism that is valuable as a coping device, others consider such a stance as growth-retarding when it becomes a substitute for needed change (Heuscher, 1980).

A final common objection to counsellor-initiated humour is that the counsellor's role of authority and credibility may be impaired.

In spite of these cautions, Hickson (1977) suggests that humour has the potential to be a valuable growth-promoting tool with the following precautions. Humour should not be used in the beginning stages, but only after the relationship has solidified through trust. Humour should then be applied in gradual doses and its effects should be gauged throughout the entire process. Finally, humour must function as an interpersonal exchange which is reciprocal, spontaneous, integrated, and appropriate.

In conclusion, the research seems to suggest a general consensus that appropriately used humour can often serve an invaluable function in the counselling relationship. Greenwald (1975) claims humour to be a potent tool for the experienced therapist. Indeed, most meaningful relationships which are considered to be close, have been abetted in their establishment, development, and maintenance through humour.

Humour and Laughter in Groups

This final section of the literature review provides the background for the consideration of the role and function of humour and laughter within the context of groups. The first part will briefly discuss some group theory relevant to this study. This will be followed by a presentation of the research literature pertaining to group humour and laughter.

Relevant Group Theory

The following concepts are important to the understanding and description of the group observed in the present study.

A group is defined as two or more persons interacting in such a way as to mutually influence each other. Group process refers to the continuous change in the dynamics observed over the life span of a group. Group function consists of two components: the primary group task or common goal, and the maintenance of group cohesiveness and solidarity. Finally, group norms are the unwritten, obligatory rules that groups develop to constrain the beliefs and behaviours of their members.

Theorists suggest that groups will typically develop through a sequence of predictable phases. Three types of models of group development have been proposed: linear-progressive models, life-cycle models, and pendular or recurring phase models (Gibbard, Hartman, & Mann, 1974).

Linear-progressive models assume that the developmental

progression of groups proceeds through stages which are sequential. An example of a linear-progressive model is the scheme proposed by Tuckman (1965) who suggests that groups will generally progress through the following stages in their development:

<u>developmental stage</u>	<u>salient group issue</u>
forming	a period of testing group boundaries and exploring interpersonal dependence
storming	a phase of inter-member conflict and emotional expression
norming	a stage featuring the promotion of group norms, solidarity, cohesion, and structure
performing	a period of active participation in the primary group task

Life-cycle models of group development extend the linear-progressive framework to include and emphasize the importance of the termination phase in the life of groups. Tuckman and Jensen (1977) reviewed the research on small group development and advanced a fifth stage to the original Tuckman (1965) scheme. Adjourning is the final phase when a group addresses the issues of termination.

Pendular or recurring phase models assume that important developmental issues are never totally resolved, but will submerge temporarily only to resurface in order to be dealt with more thoroughly when the group is ready. Bion (1959) proposes that specific group issues continually need to be readdressed. The concept of 'basic assumption cultures' include issues such as dependency/counterdependency, fight/flight, and pairing which are moods or ethos that a group may appear to be involved with at different points in its life. The recurring cycle model assumes that some group issues cannot be completely or permanently resolved.

The present study assumes a pendular model of group development which features the recurrence of the developmental issues proposed by Tuckman (1965), and Tuckman and Jensen (1977).

Group Humour and Laughter

A survey of the research literature suggests that the social functions of group humour can be understood in terms of their effect on group function. It will be recalled that group function consists of the maintenance of group cohesion, and the achievement of the primary group task. The following discussion presents the various ways that humour effects the group maintenance and task achievement functions of groups.

Humour and group maintenance. Humour may function to promote or diffuse group cohesion. Shared laughter often indicates that members share a common perspective (Dresser, 1967) and have an

awareness of the group as a unit (Hertzler, 1970). Humour can be an indicator of interpersonal attraction, an invitation to further interaction (Kane, Suls, & Tedeschi, 1977), and an expression of interpersonal compatibility (Hertzler, 1970). Dupreel (cited in Fine, 1983) notes that group integration occurs through the 'laughter of inclusion', and Miller (1967) reports that a category of Chippewa Indian humour is that which promotes solidarity.

Humour may also function as a social corrective (Wallis, 1922) in the maintenance of group norms. The humorous admonishment of deviance from group values and standards are often clear indications of boundaries. The control functions of humour and laughter attempt to compell group members to accept norms and to disavow deviance from these expectations (Powell, 1977).

Humour and laughter may serve to provoke or deter inter-member conflict. Ambiguous topics can be dealt with in ambiguous ways and humour can aid in dealing with issues that cannot be directly expressed (Fine, 1983). Humour and laughter can be used to test and communicate the degree of trust and openness existing in a group at a particular time (Rosenheim, 1974), and also to signal political alliances (Coser, 1959) and member status' in the power hierarchy. Hertzler (1970) suggests that in addition to being a form of self-congratulation, laughter can serve as an antidote to assumed superiority. As an unmasking technique, humour can communicate in a relatively safe manner, a member's non-acceptance of another member's assumed identity and the social implications that such an

acceptance would imply (Kane et al., 1977). Humour can also have the effect of facilitating group maintenance by easing situations and releasing tension when there is a divergence of interest resulting in hostility (Hertzler, 1970). As a decommitment tactic, humour in the form of playful banter can serve to circumvent conflict by declaring that a communication was not intended as serious (Kane et al., 1977). A humorous remark and the resulting laughter can also help a member 'save face' after an embarrassing 'social blunder' has been committed. Similarly, humour can deflect or cover up an insult (Hertzler, 1970).

In summary, humour and laughter can serve to facilitate or diffuse group maintenance by promoting group cohesion, maintaining group norms, and provoking or deterring inter-member conflict.

Humour and task achievement. Humour and laughter can function to facilitate or distract a group from the achievement of their primary task. Higher ranking members may use humour as a spur to action when the group seems reluctant to 'work' (Hertzler, 1970). Humour can serve as a social probing tool and a facilitator of self-disclosure (Kane et al., 1977) toward interpersonal development and exploration. When the group task becomes too uncomfortable for some members, they may use humour and laughter to maintain courage and evade fear, or to defend and protect themselves by diverting group attention away from the task.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

As previously stated, the purpose of this study was to investigate the social functions of humour in a small group setting and, hopefully, to identify propositions having potential relevance to the field of group counselling. Since research directly related to the topic is virtually nonexistent and since the data for this study were not collected for the purpose of hypothesis testing, the study must be characterized as exploratory in nature. The investigative approach adopted for the study required the systematic and intensive observation of events occurring within a single group. The study therefore has many attributes of a case study. It also may be described as naturalistic, analytic, and descriptive.

Chapter three details the procedures used to collect, codify, and analyze the data for the study.

The Observed Group

The Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Calgary offers a graduate level course in group process designed to give training in the leadership of psychoeducational, counselling, and therapeutic groups. The course spans one 13-week term and consists of a) classroom discussion of the important elements of group process and b) participation in a laboratory "self-study" group. One of the two laboratory self-study groups that were assembled from the Educational Psychology 671 class held during the winter

term of 1986 constituted the "observed" group for this study. The group in question consisted of seven members comprised of six female students and a contracted male facilitator. The observed group met weekly for 10 one-hour sessions. The primary task of the group as described to the members by the professor was to develop and explore member-member and member-group relationships.

The topic of this research was minimally described to the observed group by the researcher as an exploratory study of the social functions of humour in a small group. In exchange for the opportunity to observe the group directly from behind a one-way mirror and indirectly through the use of video-taped recordings of group sessions, the researcher provided the group with feedback after each session. This feedback focused on the researcher's subjective perceptions of group processes evidenced during the session but was devoid of any discussion of humour.

As required by the University Ethics Committee, informed consent was obtained from all participants with the following conditions clearly stated:

1. refusal to participate in the study would in no way affect course grade,
2. information obtained through observation of the group would be confidential and limited to those directly involved in the study, and
3. the video-tapes of group sessions would be erased upon completion of the research.

Definition and Classification of Humorous Episodes

For the purpose of this research, a "humorous episode" has been operationally defined as any situation or event which is simultaneously perceived by two or more group members as sufficiently amusing, funny, comical, diverting, enlivening, absurd, playful, jocular, ludicrous, etc. to elicit their laughter. The criterion of simultaneous overt laughter of two or more group members was consistently applied to identify the incidents of humour which occurred over the life span of the observed group.

Proceeding from the assumption that humour serves a social function in groups, an effort was made to select, adapt, and/or develop a taxonomy of humour based on its manifest impact upon group functioning. Existing typologies proved quite inadequate for this purpose. For example, as Fine (1983) notes, the small quantity of literature available on the social function of group humour can be categorized in terms of humour promoting group cohesion, provoking inter-member conflict, and as a means of providing social control. Martineau (1972) draws attention to function of humour in promoting or deterring inter and intra-group cohesion. Others writers (Kane, Suls, & Tedeschi, 1977; Hertzler, 1970) offer a number of social functions of humour in general. Some of the categories are repetitious in terms of group function. These typologies are incomplete for the purposes of this study and are not easily applied to group observation.

Although an agonizing search for demonstrably reliable and useful typologies proved disappointing, considerable brainstorming with

faculty and fellow students produced a "provisional" taxonomy which is conceptually elegant in its simplicity.

The typology developed for this study derives from a two-dimensional two-level (i.e., 2x2) grid which is presented here in Figure 1. The first dimension, that of group function, is conceptualized as having two components--task and maintenance. The task of the observed group was understood to be the development of adaptive and growth facilitating interpersonal relationships and group processes. Group maintenance was viewed as consisting of a concerted effort to maintain the integrity of the group through the development of group cohesion and loyalty. For the sake of simplicity, the second dimension, that of impact of humorous episodes on group function, is conceived as having two mutually exclusive values--positive (i.e., fostering or facilitating) and negative (i.e., diffusing or restraining).

		GROUP FUNCTION	
		Task	Maintenance
I M P A C T	Positive	1	2
	Negative	3	4

Figure 1. Potential impact of humorous episodes on the functioning of a group.

The four cells of Figure 1 give rise to eight discrete categories or types of humour impact as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1
Types of Humour Impact

<u>Impact of humorous episode:</u>	<u>Type in terms of Fig. 1 cell designation</u>
Facilitates task only	1
Facilitates maintenance only	2
Diffuses task only	3
Diffuses maintenance only	4
Facilitates task and maintenance	1 & 2
Facilitates task; diffuses maintenance	1 & 4
Facilitates maintenance; diffuses task	2 & 3
Diffuses task and maintenance	3 & 4

The eight types of humour-impact noted in Table 1 may be theoretically rank ordered according to their presumed contribution to group development. The assumption is made that humour which facilitates both the task and maintenance functions of a group contributes more to group development than humour which facilitates only one group function. Furthermore, humour which has a facilitating impact on a group contributes more to group development than humour which has a diffusing impact. Ranked according to these assumptions, the impact categories derived for this study constitute an ordinal scale. Resulting ranks are then inverted and used to weight humorous episodes to produce a measure of positive impact which ranges from 1 to 5 units per episode. The humour impact types

are weighted as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2

Weightings Assigned to Humorous Episodes
for Measures of Positive Impact

<u>Weighting units</u>	<u>Humour Type in terms of</u> <u>Fig. 1 cell designation</u>
5	Type 1&2 (Facilitates both task and maintenance)
4	Type 1 (Facilitates task only) OR Type 2 (Facilitates maintenance only)
3	Type 1&4 (Facilitates task; diffuses maintenance) OR Type 2&3 (Facilitates maintenance; diffuses task)
2	Type 3 (Diffuses task only) OR Type 4 (Diffuses maintenance only)
1	Type 3&4 (Diffuses both task and maintenance)

Coding Procedure

The video-taped recordings of the group for all 10 one-hour sessions were observed by the researcher and humorous episodes were identified, numbered, and classified according to the typology described in the preceding section. These video-taped recordings and the material needed to identify the humorous episodes were then given to three other observers, two male and one female, who were familiar with both the theoretical and practical aspects of group

process. Following instruction in the use of the typology developed for this study, these observers were asked to view the video-taped recordings independently and to classify each of the humorous episodes according to its impact upon the functioning of the group. The classifications of the 375 humorous episodes by the four observers were compared in the following way. The total number of Humour Type designations on which the observers agreed was divided by the total number of possible agreements. Over the course of ten sessions, the four observers achieved 764 agreements on their coding out of a possible 2250 agreements for a 34.0 percent agreement rate.

Analysis of Observations

The most agreed upon humour type classification for each humorous episode comprised the data used in the analysis of observations. The data was analyzed from four different perspectives: humour over the life-span of the group, within group sessions, over developmental issues, and within session quarters.

The average rate of humour in episodes per hour was calculated over the life span of the group. Humorous episodes were analyzed according to their observed frequencies, relative frequencies, and rate of occurrence. A chi square test for goodness of fit was calculated for differences in frequency of humour types. The frequencies, relative frequencies, and rates in assignments per hour of the positive impact weightings of humorous episodes over group life were also calculated.

Humour was analyzed from both within and across group sessions. Humour within group sessions consisted of a review of the videotapes and the identification of group content and group processes. The rate at which humour was observed in each session was calculated in episodes per hour. Humorous episodes were analyzed in terms of observed frequencies, relative frequencies, and rates of humour type. The analysis of humour across sessions involved calculating the overall rate of humour in episodes per hour for each of the ten sessions, the rates of humour type observed in each session, and the mean positive effect of humorous episodes over group sessions. Chi square tests for goodness of fit were calculated for overall frequencies of humour and for frequencies of humour type. The mean positive effect of humorous episodes was calculated over group sessions and a one-way ANOVA was calculated for the differences.

The data for the analysis of humour in the context of group development issues was initially located by identifying periods when the observed group appeared to be involved in each of the five development issues proposed by Tuckman. The overall rate at which humour was observed over periods when the group appeared to focus on specific development issues was calculated. The humorous episodes were then analyzed in terms of observed frequencies, relative frequencies, and rates of humour type over development issues. Humour across developmental issues was analyzed in terms of rates of humour in episodes per hour and the rates observed for each of the humour types. The mean positive impact of humorous

episodes was calculated over the five development issues and a one-way ANOVA was calculated for differences between the means.

The data for the analysis of humour over time-within-sessions was based on the humour observed in each of the four quarters of all sessions. The identification of group content and salient group processes was made following review of the videotapes. The overall observed rate was calculated over session quarters. The humour episodes were analyzed in terms of observed frequencies, relative frequencies, and rates of humour type over session quarters.

Analysis of humour across session quarters involved, the calculation of the rate of humour over the session quarters of all group sessions, and a chi square test for goodness of fit of the distribution of frequencies upon which these rates are based. The rates of humour type in episodes per hour for each of the four quarters of all sessions was calculated. Furthermore, a chi square test for goodness of fit was calculated for the distribution of frequencies upon which these rates are based. Finally, the mean positive effect of humorous episodes over session quarters and a one-way ANOVA for mean differences was calculated.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The results presented in this chapter constitute a detailed description of the humour observed in a self-study laboratory group of an EDPS 671 class at the University of Calgary. The results are organized and presented from four different perspectives. The first section of this chapter provides an overview of the rate and impact of humour in the life of the group (i.e., from a total life span perspective). The second section, taking a session by session perspective, outlines the topics of discussion, the group dynamics, and the nature of humour observed in each session. Attention is then drawn to the variation in the humour observed across sessions. This section is intended to highlight potential relationships between (a) the content and dynamics of various group sessions and (b) the nature of the humour observed in those sessions. The third section, taking a group developmental perspective, describes the varied nature of the observed humour as the group grappled with the five different development issues identified by Tuckman. The last section, takes a time-within-session perspective and describes the nature of humour observed in the first, second, third, and fourth quarters of all sessions. It concludes by drawing attention to the variations in the humour observed across session quarters.

Humour Over the Life Span of the Group

The observed group met for ten sessions of approximately one hour.

All sessions were carefully observed through a one-way mirror. Videotape recordings of group interaction were made for later review. In a total of 7.95 hours of observation time, 375 incidents of humour were observed for an average rate of 47.2 humorous episodes per hour.

Table 3 presents the rates at which various types of humour occurred over the lifespan of the group. A chi square test for goodness of fit indicates that the frequency and rate distributions presented in Table 3 are significantly different from rectangular. It therefore may be concluded that one or more of the observed differences in both frequencies and rates must be statistically significant ($\chi^2=42.3$; $df=3$; $p<.001$). Three types of humour (Types 1, 2, and 1&2 in terms of Figure 1 cell designations) together occurred at the rate of 41.7 episodes per hour and account for 88.5 percent of all humorous episodes observed. The five remaining types of humour (Types 3, 4, 2&3, 1&4, and 3&4 in terms of Figure 1 cell designations) together occurred at the very low rate of 5.4 episodes per hour and account for only 11.5 percent of all humorous episodes observed. The extremely low frequencies with which these latter five types of humour individually occurred precludes meaningful analysis. Accordingly, they are grouped together for further description and interpretation. The composite group is designated *Type D* to emphasize the one characteristic that these types have in common--they *diffuse* one or both of the task and maintenance functions of a group.

For the observed group, which consisted of one laboratory section

Table 3
Frequencies and Rates in Episodes Per Hour
of Humour Types Over the Life of the Group

<u>Humour Type</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
1&2 (facilitates task and maintenance)	114	30.4	14.3
2 (facilitates maintenance only)	125	33.3	15.7
1 (facilitates task only)	93	24.8	11.7
D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance)	43	11.5	5.4

of a graduate class in group dynamics, it is clear that humour served primarily to *facilitate* group maintenance and task achievement functions. Very little of the observed humour was of Type D which serves to *diffuse* these group functions.

As described in Chapter 3, the eight humour types used in this study were weighted according to their contribution to, or positive impact on group development. This procedure yields a measure of positive impact which ranges from 1 to 5 units per humorous episode. The 375 humorous episodes observed over the life span of the group, thus weighted, yield a total positive impact of 1556 units and an average positive impact of 4.16 units per humorous episode.

Table 4 presents the frequencies and rates observed in assignments per hour of the positive impact weightings of the humorous episodes over the life span of the group. It will be noted that 58.1 percent of all observed humour received a weighting of 4 positive impact units, and 30.4 percent of all humour observed was assigned a weight of 5 units.

Humour in Group Sessions

This section presents an analysis and description of the humour observed in each of the ten group sessions. Moreover, in order to portray the context in which the observed humour occurred, the major topics of group discussion and the most salient group processes manifest in each group session are first outlined.

Table 4
Frequencies and Rates in Assignments
Per Hour of Positive Impact Weightings
Over the Life of the Group

<u>Postive Impact</u>			
<u>Weighting Units</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
5	114	30.4%	14.3
4	218	58.1%	27.4
3	30	8.0%	3.7
2	8	2.1%	1.0
1	5	1.3%	0.6

Session 1

Group discussion during Session 1 appeared to focus on the following topics: (a) group goals, (b) the past group experiences of members, (c) the pros and cons of taking a break during the group session, (d) member/member conflict over taking a break, and (e) a comparison of personal reactions to conflict.

The most salient group processes observed in Session 1 may be described as: (a) assessing personal safety within the group, (b) rebelling against authority, (c) struggling for status and power, and (d) establishing alliances with other group members.

The rate at which humour was observed in Session 1 was 40.3 episodes per hour which is somewhat lower than the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour for the total life span of the group. The frequencies and rate in episodes per hour at which various types of humour were observed in Session 1 are summarized below:

<u>Type of Humour</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
1&2 (facilitates maintenance & task)	11	35.5%	14.3
2 (facilitates maintenance only)	9	29.0%	11.7
1 (facilitates task only)	6	19.4%	7.8
D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance)	5	16.1%	6.5

By way of illustration, the first line of the summary should read as follows: Humour Type 1&2 (that which facilitates both maintenance and task functions of the group) was observed on 11 occasions in Session 1. This type of humour accounted for 35.5% of all humour

observed in Session 1. Moreover, Type 1&2 humour was observed at a rate of 14.3 episodes per hour in Session 1.

Session 2

Group discussion during Session 2 appeared to focus on the following topics: (a) a comparison of personal expectations regarding group commitment and safety, (b) the handling of negative feedback, and (c) how an absent member would be brought up to date on the group's activities.

The most salient group processes observed in Session 2 may be described as: (a) assessing personal safety within the group, (b) forming a sense of group unity, and (c) establishing group norms.

The rate at which humour was observed in Session 2 was 34.6 episodes per hour which is substantially lower than the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour for the total life span of the group. The frequencies and rate in episodes per hour at which various types of humour were observed in Session 2 are summarized below:

<u>Type of Humour</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
1&2 (facilitates maintenance & task)	8	27.6%	9.9
2 (facilitates maintenance only)	8	27.6%	9.9
1 (facilitates task only)	8	27.6%	9.9
D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance)	5	17.2%	6.2

Session 3

Group discussion during Session 3 appeared to focus on the following topics: (a) the events of the previous session, (b) expectations regarding group goals, (c) the raison d'etre of the group, (d) safety within the group, (e) a comparison of individual need for structure, and (f) describing affective states through the use of colour analogies.

The most salient group processes observed in Session 3 may be described as: (a) discussing personal safety within the group, (b) promoting a sense of group unity, and (c) establishing and clarifying the group task.

The rate at which humour was observed in Session 3 was 46.7 episodes per hour which is very close to the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour for the total life span of the group. The frequencies and rate in episodes per hour at which various types of humour were observed in Session 3 are summarized below:

<u>Type of Humour</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
1&2 (facilitates maintenance & task)	12	34.3%	16.0
2 (facilitates maintenance only)	14	40.0%	18.7
1 (facilitates task only)	5	14.3%	6.7
D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance)	4	11.4%	5.3

Session 4

Group discussion during Session 4 appeared to focus on the

following topics: (a) personal needs for group structure, (b) reluctance to take the risk of suggesting and doing an exercise first, (c) the state of the group after not having met the previous week, and (d) a crying member's disclosure about how important the group was to her.

The most salient group processes observed in Session 4 may be described as: (a) assessing group safety and personal trust, (b) checking and promoting group unity, and (c) clarifying group norms.

The rate at which humour was observed in Session 4 was 60.3 episodes per hour which is substantially higher than the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour for the total life span of the group. The frequencies and rate in episodes per hour at which various types of humour were observed in Session 4 are summarized below:

<u>Type of Humour</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
1&2 (facilitates maintenance & task)	15	31.9%	19.2
2 (facilitates maintenance only)	28	59.6%	35.9
1 (facilitates task only)	2	4.3%	2.6
D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance)	2	4.3%	2.6

Session 5

Group discussion during Session 5 appeared to focus on the following topics: (a) the present state of the group, (b) the group's readiness to handle conflict, (c) perception's of the role of the leader, and (d) an extra-group incident concerning two members that had

apparently decided something about the leader.

The most salient group processes observed in Session 5 may be described as: (a) assessing personal safety within the group, (b) establishing group norms, (c) engaging in power struggles, and (d) exploring issues related to authority.

The rate at which humour was observed in Session 5 was 47.7 episodes per hour which is about equal to the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour for the total life span of the group. The frequencies and rate in episodes per hour at which various types of humour were observed in Session 5 are summarized below:

<u>Type of Humour</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
1&2 (facilitates maintenance & task)	14	34.1%	16.3
2 (facilitates maintenance only)	9	22.0%	10.5
1 (facilitates task only)	11	26.8%	12.8
D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance)	7	17.1%	8.1

Session 6

Group discussion during Session 6 appeared to focus on the following topics: (a) personal experiences over the preceding week, (b) the unfinished business of a member who felt she owed the leader an apology, (c) appropriate behaviour with respect to disclosure, (d) the unfinished business of a member who had thought that she had been unfairly implicated in a conspiracy against the leader the previous session, and (e) group safety.

The most salient group processes observed in Session 6 may be described as: (a) assessing personal safety within the group, (b) establishing and clarifying group norms, (c) attending to group maintenance, and (d) exploring relationships between some members.

The rate at which humour was observed in Session 6 was 62.3 episodes per hour which is substantially higher than the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour for the total life span of the group. The frequencies and rate in episodes per hour at which various types of humour were observed in Session 6 are summarized below:

<u>Type of Humour</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
1&2 (facilitates maintenance & task)	16	34.0%	20.8
2 (facilitates maintenance only)	11	23.4%	14.3
1 (facilitates task only)	9	19.1%	11.7
D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance)	11	23.4%	14.3

Session 7

Group discussion during Session 7 appeared to focus on the following topics: (a) the group as a unit, (b) feedback on interpersonal styles and differences, (c) concern over taking up too much group time, and (d) the quieter members' sense of group safety and personal trust.

The most salient group processes observed in Session 7 may be described as: (a) working on the primary task of interpersonal exploration, and (b) attending to maintenance issues regarding some

quieter group members.

The rate at which humour was observed in Session 7 was 30.0 episodes per hour which is substantially below the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour for the total life span of the group. The frequencies and rate in episodes per hour at which various types of humour were observed in Session 7 are summarized below:

<u>Type of Humour</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
1&2 (facilitates maintenance & task)	7	29.2%	8.8
2 (facilitates maintenance only)	3	12.5%	3.8
1 (facilitates task only)	10	41.7%	12.5
D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance)	4	16.7%	5.0

Session 8

Group discussion during Session 8 appeared to focus on the following topics: (a) the unfinished business of one member asking for a clarification of feedback she had received the previous session, and (b) the impending end of the group.

The most salient group processes observed in Session 8 may be described as: (a) re-engaging in power struggles, (b) working at the task of interpersonal exploration, and (c) attending to maintenance issues, especially concerning group termination.

The rate at which humour was observed in Session 8 was 53.5 episodes per hour which is somewhat higher than the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour for the total life span of the group. The

frequencies and rate in episodes per hour at which various types of humour were observed in Session 8 are summarized below:

<u>Type of Humour</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
1&2 (facilitates maintenance & task)	8	21.1%	11.3
2 (facilitates maintenance only)	11	29.0%	15.5
1 (facilitates task only)	16	42.1%	22.5
D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance)	3	7.9%	4.2

Session 9

Group discussion during Session 9 appeared to focus on the following topics: (a) the discussion that some members had while viewing together the videotape of the previous session, (b) perceptions of the accomplishments made over the course of group life, (c) attempts to resolve the conflict between two members, and (d) group leaders in general.

The most salient group processes observed in Session 9 may be described as: (a) attending to termination, (b) exploring reactions to authority, and (c) attempting to bring closure to unfinished business.

The rate at which humour was observed in Session 9 was 55.6 episodes per hour which is substantially higher than the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour for the total life span of the group. The frequencies and rate in episodes per hour at which various types of humour were observed in Session 9 are summarized below:

<u>Type of Humour</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
1&2 (facilitates maintenance & task)	14	31.1%	17.3
2 (facilitates maintenance only)	11	24.4%	13.6
1 (facilitates task only)	19	42.2%	23.4
D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance)	1	2.2%	1.2

Session 10

Group discussion during Session 10 appeared to focus on the following topics: (a) a member's accusation that another member "had not been a part of the group," (b) personal testimonies about how good the group was for some members, (c) stated "sadness" over group loss, (d) personally significant group events and experiences, and (e) the informal gathering that would be the formal group termination.

The most salient group processes observed in Session 10 may be described as: (a) resuming power struggles, (b) attempting closure on unfinished business, and (c) terminating.

The rate at which humour was observed in Session 10 was 41.6 episodes per hour which is somewhat lower than the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour for the total life span of the group. The frequencies and rate in episodes per hour at which various types of humour were observed in Session 10 are summarized below:

<u>Type of Humour</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
1&2 (facilitates maintenance & task)	9	23.7%	10.1
2 (facilitates maintenance only)	21	55.3%	23.6

1 (facilitates task only)	7	18.4%	7.9
D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance)	1	2.6%	1.1

Comparisons of Humour Across Sessions

This section compares the rate, frequency of humour type, and positive impact of observed episodes of humour across sessions.

Figure 2 depicts the rate of humour in episodes per hour for each of the ten sessions and compares these rates to the mean rate per hour over all sessions. A chi square test for goodness of fit indicates that the distribution of frequencies upon which the rates of humour presented in Figure 2 are based is significantly different from rectangular at the level selected for this study ($\chi^2 = 15.8$; $df = 9$; $p < .10$). It will be observed that the rates of humour for the first two sessions are below the average rate for all sessions. The rates of humour for the Sessions 4 and 6 are above the average rate for all sessions. Session 7 shows a noticeable drop in rate while in the last three sessions the rate of humour fluctuates about the average mark. With the exception of Sessions 1 and 2, and 8 and 9, there is a difference in rate of humour of at least 12 humorous episodes per hour between consecutive sessions.

Figure 3a shows the rate of Type 1&2 humour (that which facilitates both task and maintenance) in episodes per hour observed in each of the ten group sessions. A chi square test for goodness of fit indicates that the distribution of frequencies upon which the rates of Humour Type 1&2 presented in Figure 3a are based is not

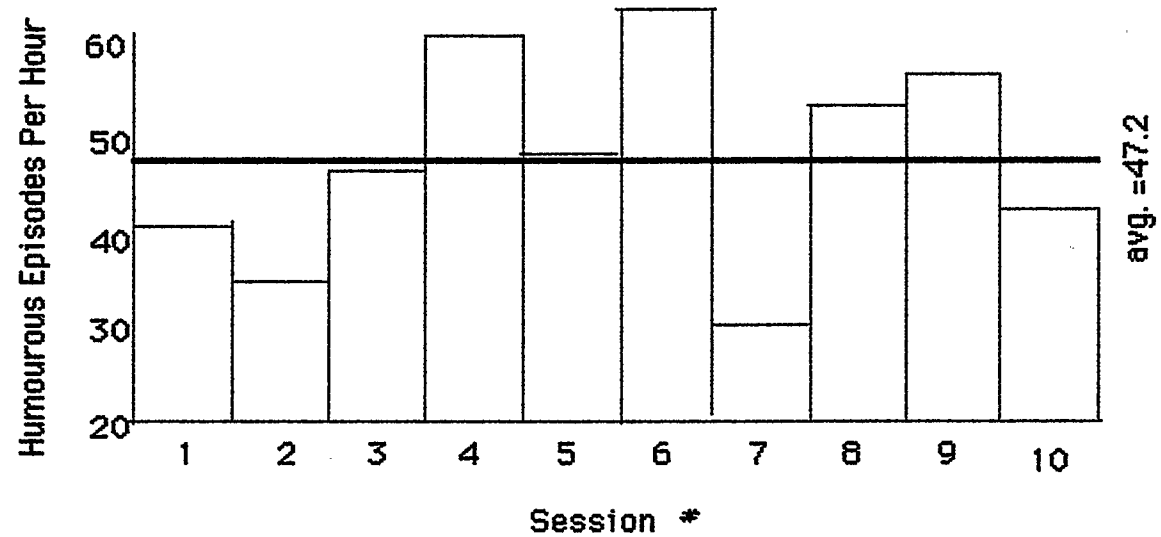


Figure 2. Rate of humour in episodes per hour over all sessions.

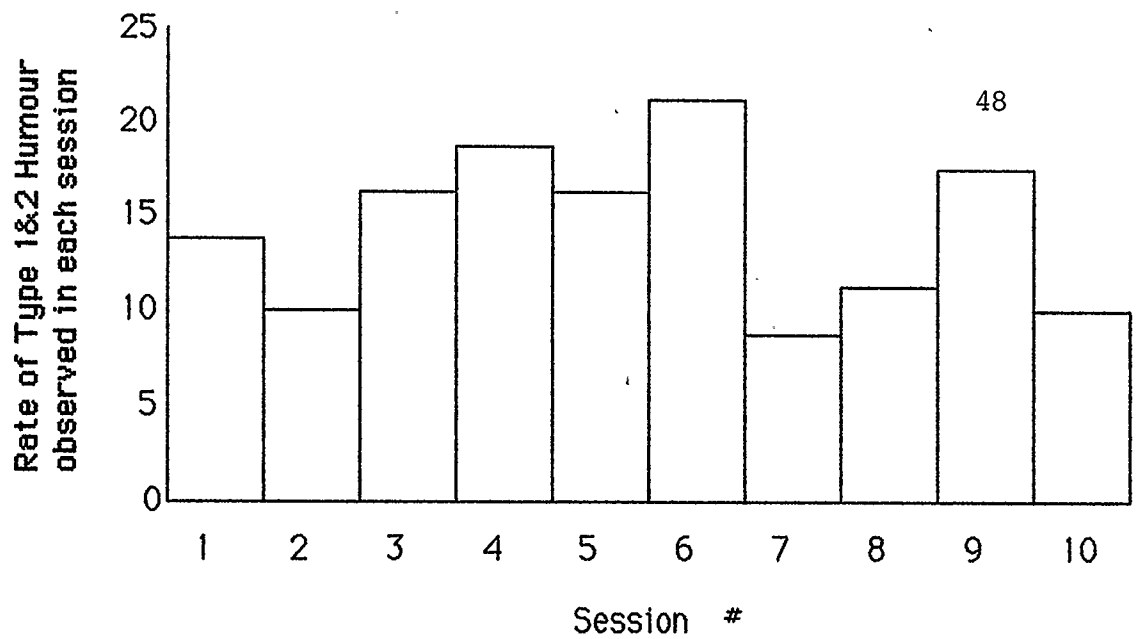


Figure 3a. Distribution of rate of Humour Type 1&2 (facilitates both task and maintenance) in episodes per hour over sessions.

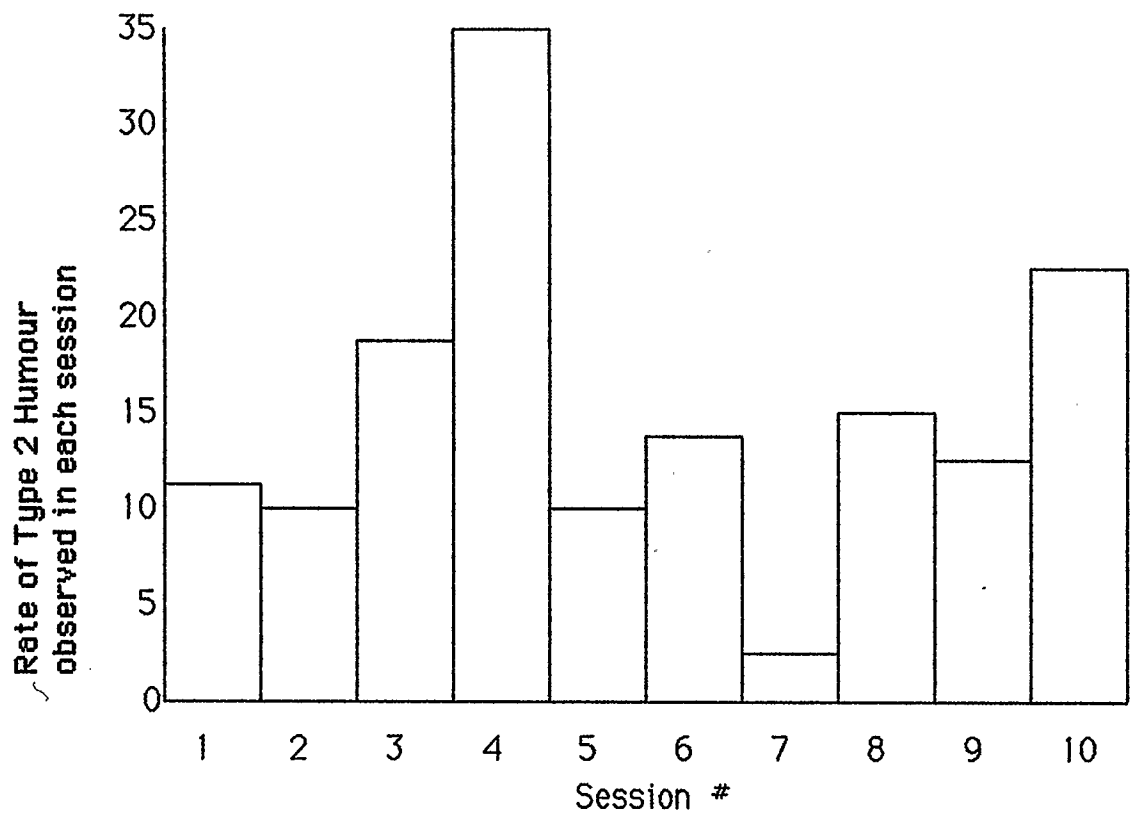


Figure 3b. Distribution of rate of Humour Type 2 (facilitates maintenance only) in episodes per hour over sessions.

significantly different from rectangular ($\chi^2 = 11.6$; $df = 9$; $p < .30$). In other words, the observed differences in rate are not statistically significant.

Figure 3b shows the rate of Type 2 humour (that which facilitates group maintenance only) in episodes per hour observed in each session. A chi square test for goodness of fit indicates that the distribution of frequencies upon which the rates of Humour Type 2 presented in Figure 3b are based is significantly different from rectangular ($\chi^2 = 36.5$; $df = 9$; $p < .001$). It therefore may be concluded that one or more of the observed differences in rates must be statistically significant. Sessions 4 and 10 claimed the highest rates of Type 2 humour, while Session 7 had the lowest.

Figure 3c shows the rate of Type 1 humour (that which facilitates group task only) in episodes per hour observed in each session. A chi square test for goodness of fit indicates that the distribution of frequencies upon which the rates of Humour Type 1 presented in Figure 3c are based is significantly different from rectangular ($\chi^2 = 24.9$; $df = 9$; $p < .01$). It therefore may be inferred that one or more of the observed differences in rates must be statistically significant. While Sessions 8 and 9 had the highest rates, Session 4 had the lowest.

Figure 3d shows the rate of Type D humour (that which diffuses one or both of maintenance and task) in episodes per hour over all sessions. A chi square test for goodness of fit indicates that the distribution of frequencies upon which the rates of Humour Type D presented in Figure 3d are based is significantly different from

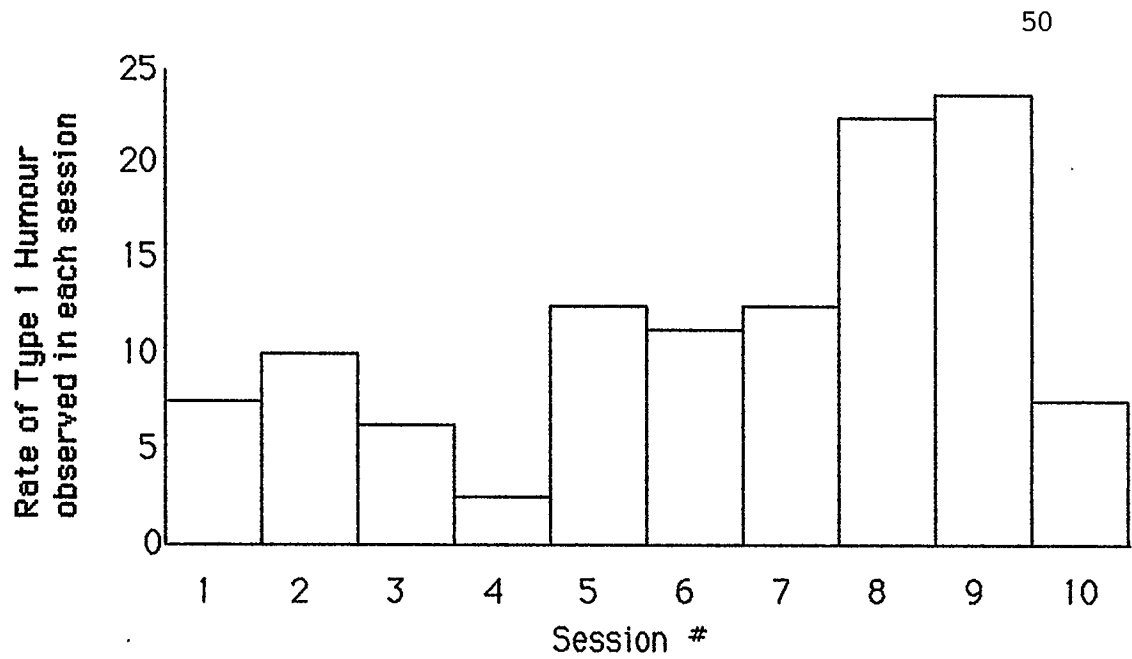


Figure 3c. Distribution of rate of Humour Type 1 (facilitates task only) in episodes per hour over sessions.

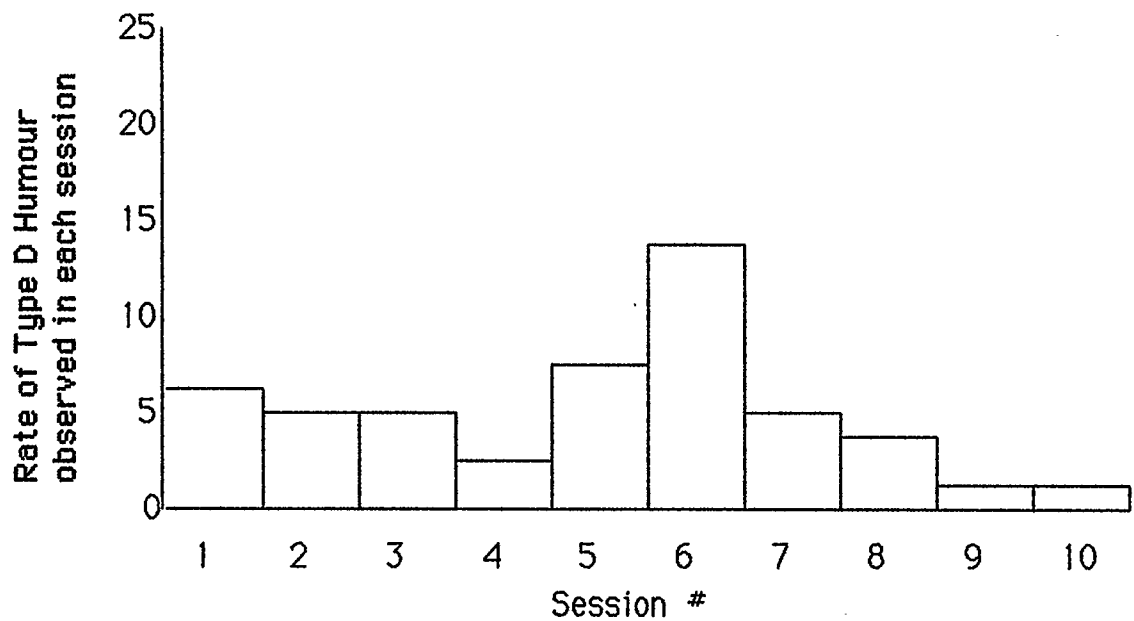


Figure 3d. Distribution of rates of Humour Type D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance) in episodes per hour over sessions.

rectangular ($\chi^2 = 19.1$; $df = 9$; $p < .05$). In other words, one or more of the observed differences in rates must be statistically significant. It is notable that the highest rate of Type D humour was observed in Session 6, while Sessions 4, 9, and 10 had the lowest rates per hour.

Figure 4 presents the distribution of the mean positive effect of humorous episodes over group sessions. The mean positive effect for all observed humorous episodes is 4.16 units per episode and the standard deviation is .27. A one-way ANOVA produces an $F(9, 365) = 6.23$ where a critical value of 2.46 denotes significance at the .01 level. We may conclude, therefore that one or more of the observed differences between the means for group sessions are significant. It will be observed that a relatively high mean positive impact occurred in Sessions 4 and 9, while a relatively low mean positive impact for humour episodes occurred in Sessions 1, 2, and 7.

Humour in the Context of Group Development Issues

This section takes a group development perspective and describes the nature of observed humour during the periods when the group appeared to involve itself in specific development issues. As described in Chapter 2, Tuckman identified five issues--forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning--that groups typically address at various points in their development. The group observed in this study seemed to be of no exception. The content of group discussion and manifest group dynamics suggest that the five developmental issues were attended to in the following sessions:

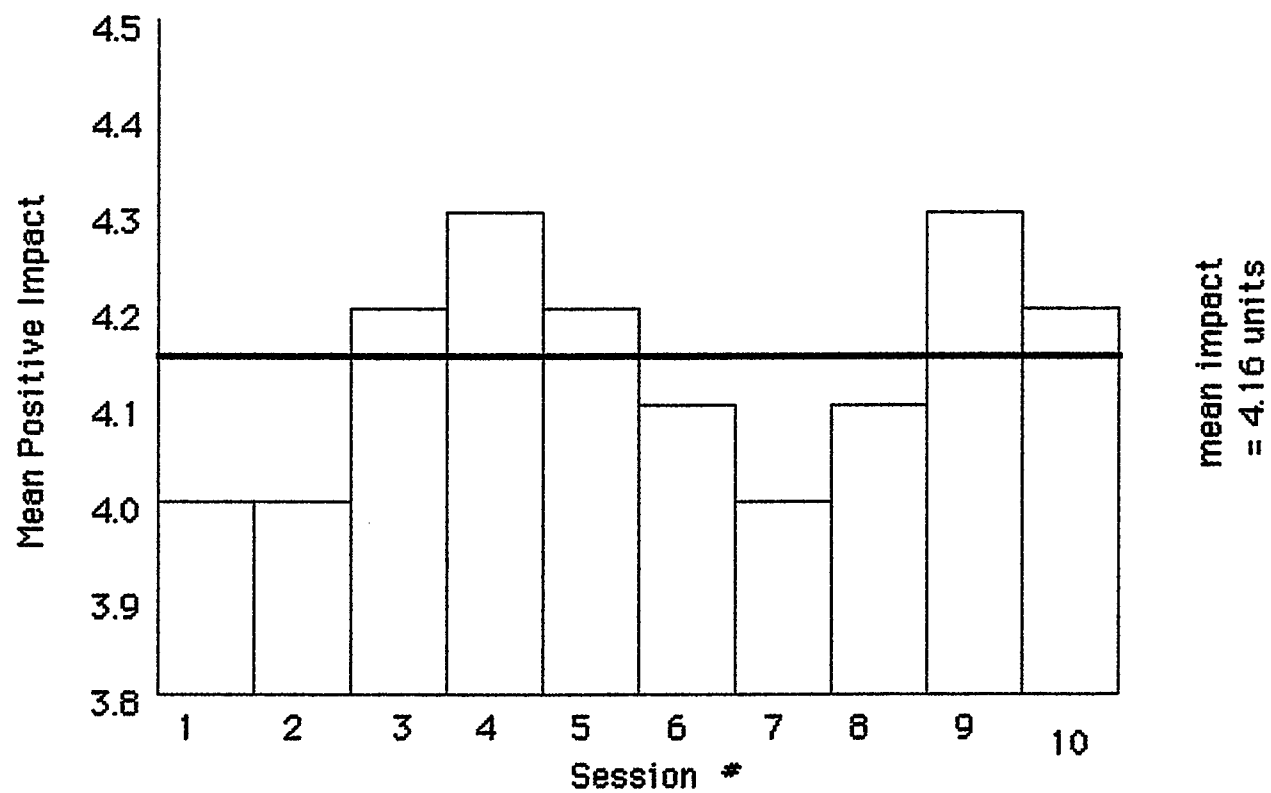


Figure 4. Mean positive impact of humour episodes over sessions.

<u>Developmental Issue</u>	<u>Session of Focus</u>
Forming	2, 3, and 4
Storming	1 and 10
Norming	2, 5, and 6
Performing	7 and 8
Adjourning	8, 9, and 10

The analysis and description of the humour observed when the group appeared to be concerned with each of the development issues, is derived from the sessions suggested as periods when the specific issues were attended to. It will be noted that during some sessions more than one development issue was salient. Moreover, the recurrence of developmental issues over group sessions is consistent with pendular models of group development.

Forming

The rate at which humour was observed during the period when the group seemed to concern itself with forming issues was 47.4 episodes per hour which is close to the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour for the total life span of the group. The frequencies and rates in episodes per hour at which various types of humour were observed when the group was forming are summarized below:

<u>Type of Humour</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
1&2 (facilitates maintenance & task)	35	31.5%	15.0
2 (facilitates maintenance only)	50	45.0%	21.4

1 (facilitates task only)	15	13.5%	6.4
D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance)	11	9.9%	4.7

Storming

The rate at which humour was observed during the period when the group seemed to concern itself with storming, Sessions 1 and 10, was 41.6 episodes per hour which is somewhat lower than the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour for the total life span of the group. The frequencies and rate in episodes per hour at which various types of humour were observed when the group was storming are summarized below:

<u>Type of Humour</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
1&2 (facilitates maintenance & task)	20	29.0%	12.1
2 (facilitates maintenance only)	30	43.5%	18.1
1 (facilitates task only)	13	18.8%	7.8
D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance)	6	8.7%	3.6

Norming

The rate at which humour was observed during the period when the group seemed to concern itself with norming issues was 47.5 episodes per hour which is very close to the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour for the total life span of the group. The frequencies and rate in episodes per hour at which various types of humour were

observed when the group was norming are summarized below:

<u>Type of Humour</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
1&2 (facilitates maintenance & task)	38	32.5%	15.6
2 (facilitates maintenance only)	28	23.9%	11.5
1 (facilitates task only)	28	23.9%	11.5
D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance)	23	19.6%	9.4

Performing

The rate at which humour was observed during the period when the group seemed to concern itself with performing was 41.0 episodes per hour which is somewhat lower than the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour for the total life span of the group. The frequencies and rate in episodes per hour at which various types of humour were observed when the group was performing are summarized below:

<u>Type of Humour</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
1&2 (facilitates maintenance & task)	15	24.2%	9.9
2 (facilitates maintenance only)	14	22.6%	9.3
1 (facilitates task only)	26	41.9%	17.2
D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance)	7	11.3%	4.6

Adjourning

The rate at which humour was observed during the periods when the group seemed to concern itself with adjourning was 50.2 episodes per

hour which is somewhat higher than the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour for the total life span of the group. The frequencies and rate in episodes per hour at which various types of humour were observed when the group was adjourning are summarized below:

<u>Type of Humour</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
1&2 (facilitates maintenance & task)	31	25.6%	12.9
2 (facilitates maintenance only)	43	37.2%	17.8
1 (facilitates task only)	42	34.7%	17.4
D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance)	5	4.1%	2.1

Comparisons of Humour Across Development Issues

This section compares the rate, frequency of humour type, and positive impact of observed episodes of humour across group development issues.

Figure 5 shows the rate of humour in episodes per hour for five group development issues. It will be observed that the distribution is relatively flat.

Figure 6a shows the rate of Type 1&2 humour (that which facilitates both group task and maintenance) in episodes per hour observed in each of five development issues.

Figure 6b, shows the rate of Type 2 humour (that which facilitates group maintenance only) in episodes per hour observed in each of five development issues. It will be noted that the rate of Type 2 humour is relatively high during forming, storming, and adjourning and

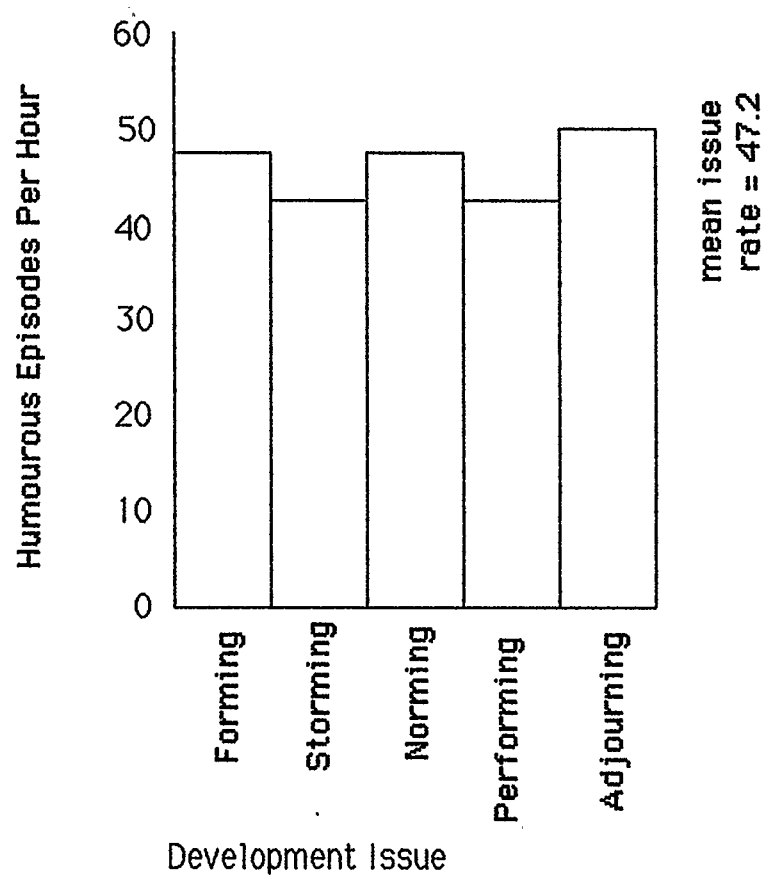


Figure 5. Rate of humour in episodes per hour over five development issues.

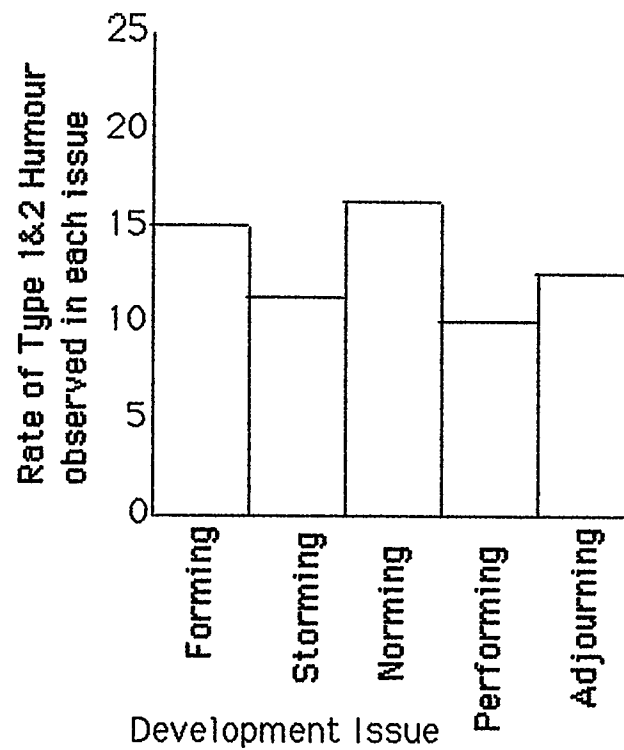


Figure 6a. Distribution of rate of Humour Type 1&2 (facilitates both task and maintenance) in episodes per hour over group development issues.

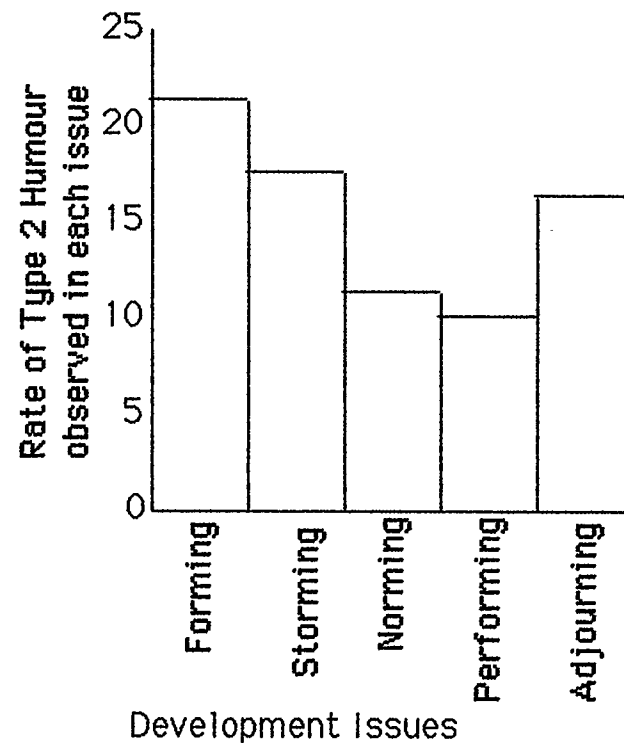


Figure 6b. Distribution of rate of Humour Type 2 (facilitates maintenance only) in episodes per hour over group developmental issues.

relatively low during norming and performing.

Figure 6c shows the rate of Type 1 humour (that which facilitates group task only) in episodes per hour observed in each of five development issues. The curve is step-shaped (i.e. monotonic increasing) with rate increases occurring during forming and storming, and continuing to increase during norming, performing, and adjourning.

Figure 6d shows the rate of Type D humour (that which diffuses one or both of maintenance and task) in episodes per hour during the group's focus on each of five development issues. The proportion of Type D humour observed peaks during the norming issue, with a lower rate of Type D humour being observed when the group appeared to focus upon adjourning.

Figure 7 is a distribution of the mean positive impact of humorous episodes calculated over the five development issues. A one-way ANOVA produces an $F(4, 475) = .64$ where a critical value of 2.39 would be required to demonstrate the significance of a difference between one or more issue means at the .05 level. Moreover, the observed differences between the means for the various development issues are probably too small to have practical relevance.

Humour Within Session Quarters

This final section takes a time-within-session perspective and provides a description of the humour observed in the first, second, third, and fourth quarters of all sessions. A discussion of the topics of group discussion and the most salient group processes common to

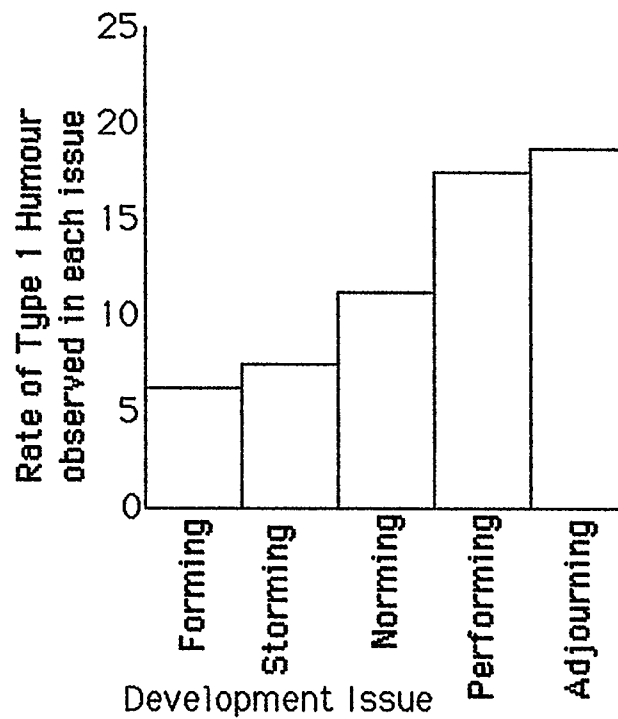


Figure 6c. Distribution of rate of Humour Type 1 (facilitates task only) in episodes per hour over group development issues.

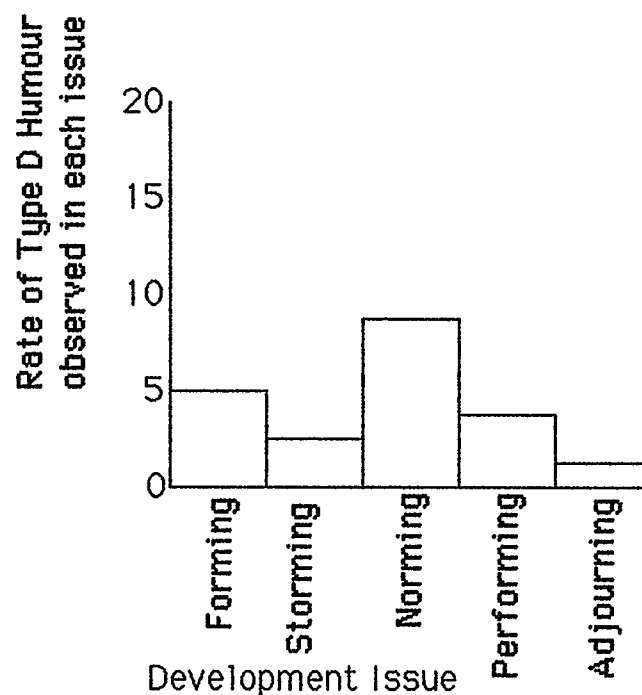


Figure 6d. Distribution of rate of Humour Type D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance) in episodes per hour over group development issues.

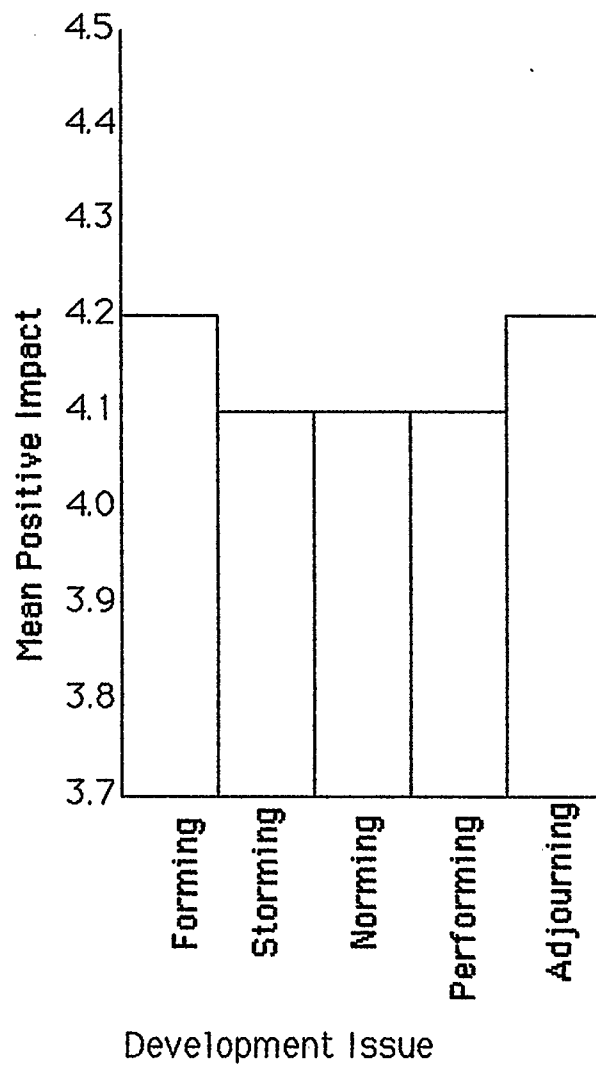


Figure 7. Mean positive impact of humour episodes over group issues.

each of the session quarters provides the context in which the observed humorous episodes occurred.

First Quarters

Group discussion during the first quarters of each session appeared to focus on the following topics: (a) greeting amenities, (b) the present state of the group, (c) what the group will do during the session, (d) unfinished business from previous sessions.

Common group processes observed in the first session quarters may be described as: (a) attending to group maintenance, (b) preparing to work on the group task, and (c) working on closure of issues left hanging from the previous session.

The rate at which humour was observed in the first quarters of all sessions was 38.2 episodes per hour which is substantially lower than the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour over all session quarters. The frequencies and rate in episodes per hour at which various types of humour were observed in the first session quarters are summarized below:

<u>Type of Humour</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
1&2 (facilitates maintenance & task)	15	19.7%	7.5
2 (facilitates maintenance only)	46	60.5%	23.1
1 (facilitates task only)	4	5.3%	2.0
D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance)	11	14.5%	5.5

Second Quarters

Group discussion during the second quarters of each session appeared to focus on the following topics: (a) conversation in the 'there and then', (b) what the group will do during the session, and (c) unfinished business from previous sessions.

Common group processes observed in the second quarters of each session may be described as: (a) preparing to engage in the group task, (b) attempting to work through unfinished business, (c) avoiding work on the primary group task, and (d) working at the task of interpersonal exploration.

The rate at which humour was observed in the second session quarters was 32.2 episodes per hour which is substantially lower than the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour over all session quarters. The frequencies and rate in episodes per hour at which various types of humour were observed in the second session quarters are summarized below:

<u>Type of Humour</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
1&2 (facilitates maintenance & task)	24	36.4%	12.1
2 (facilitates maintenance only)	14	21.2%	7.0
1 (facilitates task only)	19	28.8%	9.6
D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance)	9	13.6%	4.5

Third Quarters

Group discussion during the third quarters of all sessions appeared

to focus on the following topics: (a) how to facilitate group task, (b) the group as a unit, and (c) perceptions of group members.

Common group processes observed in the third quarters of all sessions may be described as: (a) preparing for, or engaging in the task of interpersonal exploration, and (b) attending to group maintenance, especially in the later sessions.

The rate at which humour was observed in the third session quarters was 51.3 episodes per hour which is somewhat higher than the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour over all session quarters. The frequencies and rate in episodes per hour at which various types of humour were observed in the third session quarters are summarized below:

<u>Type of Humour</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
1&2 (facilitates maintenance & task)	37	36.3%	18.6
2 (facilitates maintenance only)	29	28.4%	14.6
1 (facilitates task only)	26	25.5%	13.1
D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance)	10	9.8%	5.0

Fourth Quarters

Group discussion during the fourth quarters of each session appeared to focus on the following topics: (a) perceptions about each other, (b) loose ends surfacing over the course of the session, (c) current state of member comfort, (d) the group as a unit, and (e) a general sense of levity.

Common group processes observed in the fourth quarters of each session may be described as: (a) working on the primary group task, (b) bringing at least temporary closure on issues before the group departs, (c) reaffirming a positive sense of group unity, and (d) attending to group maintenance after the events of the session.

The rate at which humour was observed in the fourth session quarters was 66.3 episodes per hour which is substantially higher than the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour over all session quarters. The frequencies and rate in episodes per hour at which various types of humour were observed in the fourth session quarters are summarized below:

<u>Type of Humour</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%f</u>	<u>Rate</u>
1&2 (facilitates maintenance & task)	38	29.0%	19.1
2 (facilitates maintenance only)	36	27.5%	18.1
1 (facilitates task only)	44	33.6%	22.1
D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance)	13	9.9%	6.5

Comparisons of Humour Across Session Quarters

This section compares the rate, frequency of humour type, and positive impact of observed episodes of humour across session quarters.

Figure 8 shows the rate of observed humorous episodes over the first, second, third, and fourth session quarters of all group sessions, and compares this rate to the mean rate for all session quarters. A

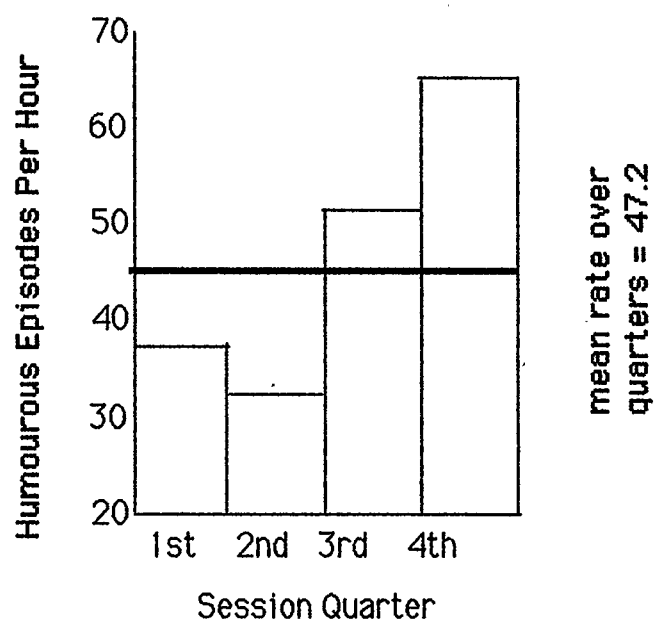


Figure 8. Rate of humour in episodes per hour over session quarters.

chi square test for goodness of fit indicates that the distribution of frequencies upon which the rates of humour across session quarters presented in Figure 8 are based is significantly different from rectangular ($\chi^2 = 30.0$; $df = 3$; $p < .001$). It therefore may be concluded that one or more of the observed differences in rates must be statistically significant. Observe that the resulting histogram is J-shaped with rates of humour in quarters one and two considerably below average, and with the fourth quarters showing considerably above average episode per hour rates.

Figure 9a shows the rate of Type 1&2 humour (that which facilitates both task and maintenance) in episodes per hour for each of the four quarters of all sessions. A chi square test for goodness of fit indicates that the distribution of frequencies upon which the rates of Humour Type 1&2 presented in Figure 9a are based is significantly different from rectangular ($\chi^2 = 12.8$; $df = 3$; $p < .01$). It thus may be inferred that one or more of the observed differences in rates must be statistically significant. It will be observed that the rate of Type 1&2 humour increases steadily through quarters one, two, three, and four. In other words, rate of Type 1&2 humour appears to be a monotonic increasing function of time within session.

Figure 9b shows the rate of Type 2 humour (that which facilitates maintenance only) in episodes per hour observed for each of the four quarters of all sessions. A chi square test for goodness of fit indicates that the distribution of frequencies upon which the rates of Humour Type 2 presented in Figure 9b are based is significantly different from rectangular ($\chi^2 = 16.8$; $df = 3$; $p < .001$). In other words,

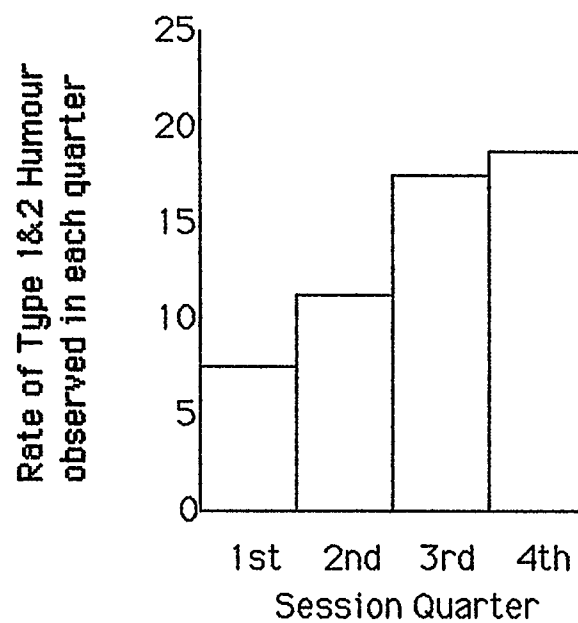


Figure 9a. Distribution of rate of Humour Type1&2 (facilitating both task and maintenance) in episodes per hour over session quarters.

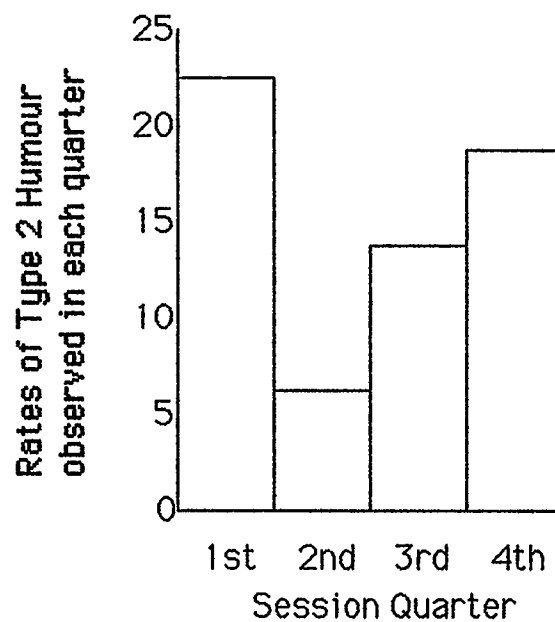


Figure 9b. Distribution of rate of Humour Type 2 (facilitates maintenance) in episodes per hour over session quarters.

one or more of the observed differences in rates must be statistically significant. It will be observed that Type 2 humour occurs at its highest rate in the first quarter of all sessions. A precipitous drop in the rate of Type 2 humour occurs in the second quarter of the sessions. Thereafter a steady rate increase in Type 2 humour is observed in the third and fourth quarters of the sessions.

Figure 9c, shows the rate of Type 1 humour (that which facilitates group task only) in episodes per hour observed for each of the four quarters of all sessions. A chi square test for goodness of fit indicates that the distribution of frequencies upon which the rates of Humour Type 1 presented in Figure 9c are based is significantly different from rectangular ($\chi^2 = 35.6$; $df = 3$; $p < .001$). It therefore may be inferred that one or more of the observed differences in rates are statistically significant. It will be noted that Type 1 humour was observed at a very low rate in the first quarters of the sessions. However, a steady and approximately linear increase in the rate of Type 1 humour over the four quarters of the sessions results in a high rate of Type 1 humour observed in the last quarter of the group sessions.

Figure 9d shows the rate of Type D humour (that which diffuses one or both of maintenance and task) in episodes per hour for each of the four quarters of all sessions. A chi square test for goodness of fit indicates that the distribution of frequencies upon which the rates of Humour Type D presented in Figure 9d are based is not significantly different from rectangular ($\chi^2 = 0.8$; $df = 3$; $p < .90$). It therefore may be implied that the observed differences in rates are not statistically

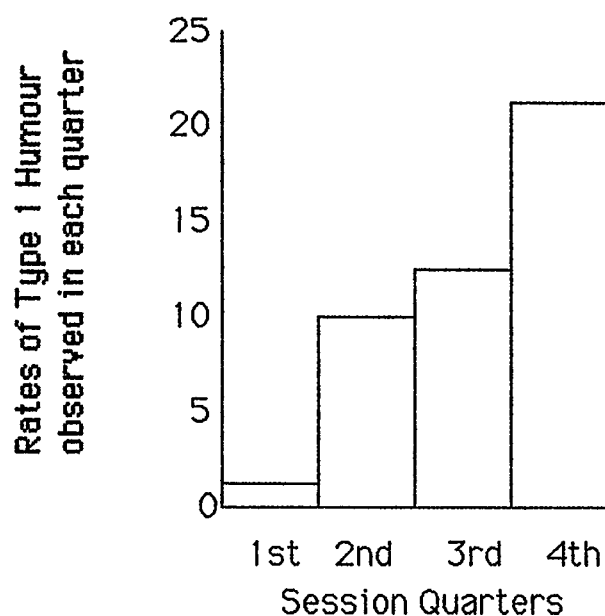


Figure 9c. Distribution of rate of Humour Type 1 (facilitates task) in episodes per hour over session quarters.

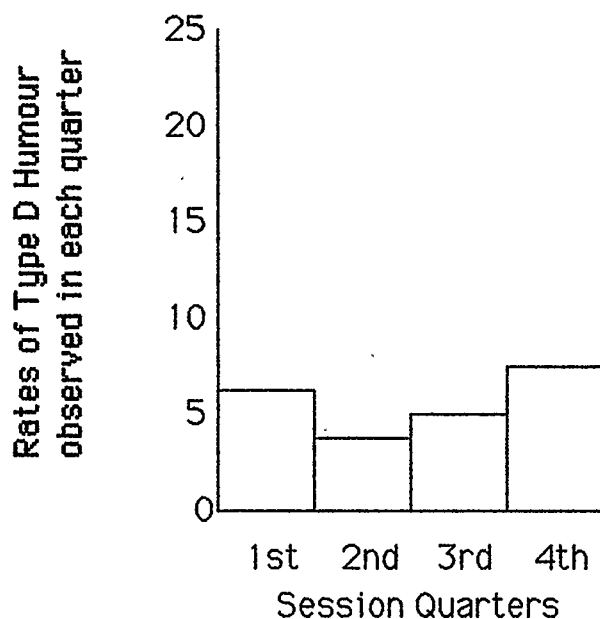


Figure 9d. Distribution of rate of Humour Type D (diffuses one or both of task and maintenance) in episodes per hour over session quarters.

significant. Moreover, the observed differences appear to be too small to have practical relevance.

Figure 10 shows the distribution of the mean positive effect of humorous episodes over session quarters. A one-way ANOVA produces an $F(3, 371) = 1.17$ where a critical value of 2.62 would be required to demonstrate the significance of a difference between one or more quarter-session means at the .05 level. Moreover, the observed differences between the means for quarter-sessions appear to be too small to have practical relevance.

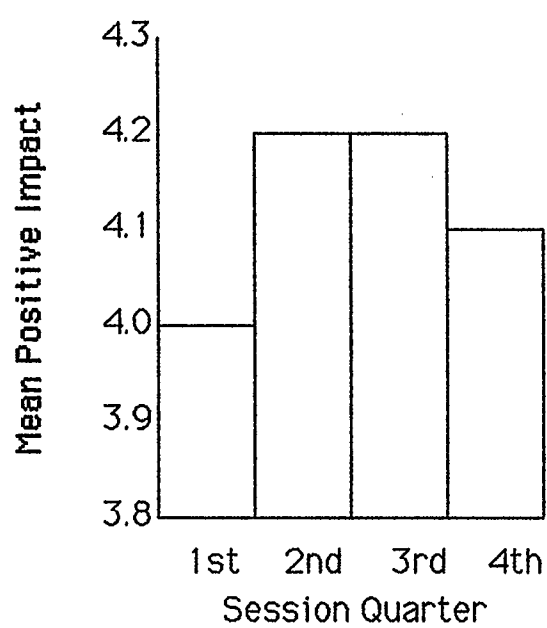


Figure 10. Mean positive impact of humour episodes over session quarters.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Various relationships between humour and other variables of psychological interest are suggested by the results of this study. The first section of this chapter draws attention to the more salient of these ostensible relationships and presents formal hypotheses based upon them. The limitations of the study are outlined in Section 2. The final section then provides a discussion of the implications of the study for research and for counselling practice.

Discussion of the Results and Generation of Hypotheses

Humour Over the Life Span of the Group

In this study, humour as evidenced by shared laughter was observed at a mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour, or one episode every 76 seconds. This observation suggests the hypotheses that:
Humour plays a pervasive role in the dynamics of a self-study group.

As indicated in Table 3, more than 88 percent of the humour observed in the self-study group facilitated either one or both of the task achievement and maintenance functions of the group. It is therefore hypothesized that: *Most humorous episodes observed in a self-study group will serve to facilitate either one or both of the*

task achievement and maintenance functions of the group.

The results depicted in Table 4 suggest that most humorous episodes had a positive impact on the development of the observed group. On the basis of this observation it is hypothesized that: *Most humorous episodes observed in a self-study group will have a positive impact on group development.*

Humour in Group Sessions

The rate of humour observed in Session 1 at 40.3 episodes per hour, is somewhat lower than the mean rate for all sessions of 47.2 episodes per hour. The rate of humorous episodes observed in Session 2 at 34.6 episodes per hour, is substantially lower than the mean rate over all sessions. The initial agenda of a self-study group is apparently perceived as a relatively serious matter. These observations give rise to the hypothesis that: *The rate of humour in a self-study group will be relatively low during the first two or three sessions.*

Forty percent of the humorous episodes observed in Session 3 were of Type 2 (that which facilitates group maintenance only). Moreover, the rate of Type 1 humour (that which facilitates task achievement only) observed in Session 3 was only 6.7 episodes per hour. By way of contrast, Type 2 humour occurred at a rate of 18.7 episodes per hour. These differential rates are understandable since a major group concern at this point, was the promotion of a sense of unity. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that: *When a group*

is establishing unity, the rate of humour serving to facilitate group maintenance only will be relatively high, and the rate of humour serving to facilitate task achievement only will be relatively low.

The rate of humorous episodes observed in Session 4 at 60.4 episodes per hour, was substantially higher than the mean rate over all sessions. Moreover, 59.6 percent of all the humorous episodes observed in Session 4 were of Type 2 (that which facilitates group maintenance only). Type 1 humour (that which facilitates task only) and Type D humour (that which diffuses one or both of group maintenance and task achievement) were observed at very low rates in Session 4. Humour appeared to reduce the discomfort some members experienced as a result of one member crying during Session 4. It also tended to preserve the warm climate that this event apparently had fostered. These observations give rise to the hypothesis that: *A self-study group's effort to achieve cohesion will be accompanied by a relatively high rate of humour, most of which will facilitate group maintenance only and little of which will facilitate task achievement only.*

The rate of humour observed in Session 6, at 62.3 episodes per hour, was substantially higher than the mean rate over all sessions. Moreover, Humour Type D (that which diffuses one or both of group maintenance and task achievement) was observed at a relatively high rate in Session 6. Furthermore, 91 percent of Type D humour observed in Session 6 was of Humour Type 2&3 (that which facilitates group maintenance but diffuses task achievement).

Diffusing humour appeared to move the group away from its task since there was "unfinished business" which made some members feel uncomfortable. While some members were eager to deal with the issues at hand, others were not ready. Humour, thus served to maintain group cohesiveness, while momentarily diffusing the task. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that: *A relatively high rate of humour, much of which serves to facilitate group maintenance, albeit at the expense of task achievement, will accompany a group's attempt to deal with the personal and emotional issues of its members.*

The rate of humour observed in Session 7 was 30.0 episodes per hour, which is substantially lower than the mean rate over all sessions at 47.2 episodes per hour. Moreover, 41.7 percent of the humorous episodes observed in Session 7 were of Type 1 (that which facilitates task achievement only). Type 2 humour (that which facilitates group maintenance only) was observed at its lowest rate in Session 7. The group was working hardest at its task of interpersonal exploration and there appeared to be little need to focus on group maintenance at this point. On the basis of these observations it is hypothesized that: *When a self-study group begins to work at its hardest (i.e., becomes most task oriented), the rate of humour observed in the group will be relatively low and the humour which is observed will be mostly of a type that facilitates task achievement only, and little of a type which serves to facilitate group maintenance only.*

The rate of humorous episodes observed in Session 8 was 53.5 episodes per hour, which is somewhat higher than the overall average rate. Moreover, 42.1 percent of all humorous episodes observed in Session 8 were of Type 1 (that which facilitates task achievement only). The group also continued "working" during Session 8. On the basis of these observations it is hypothesized that: *As a self-study group continues in its work orientation, the rate of humour observed will increase and the observed humour will be largely of a type that facilitates task achievement only.*

The rate of humour observed in Session 9 at 55.6 episodes per hour, was substantially higher than the mean rate of 47.2 humorous episodes per hour over all sessions. Moreover, 42.2 percent of all humorous episodes observed in Session 9 were Type 1 (that which facilitates task achievement only), and this translates to a rate of 23.4 Type 1 episodes per hour over the session. Type D humour (that which diffuses one or both of group maintenance and task achievement) was observed at a very low rate in Session 9. The group appeared to be terminating in Session 9, and the task that it was engaged in was the task of bringing closure to unfinished business. On the basis of these observations it is hypothesized that: *There will be a high rate of task facilitating humour, and a low rate of humour serving to diffuse one or both of group maintenance and task achievement at times when a group is attempting to bring closure to unfinished business.*

The rate of humorous episodes observed in Session 10 was 41.6

episodes per hour, which is somewhat lower than the mean rate over all sessions. Moreover, 55.3 percent of all humorous episodes observed in Session 10 were of Humour Type 2 (that which facilitates group maintenance only). It will also be noted that Type D humour (that which diffuses one or both of group maintenance and task achievement) was observed at a rate of only 1.1 episodes per hour in Session 10. On the basis of these observations it is hypothesized that: *As a self-study group terminates, the rate of humour observed in the group will be relatively low and that which is observed will be largely of a type that promotes fellowship, friendship, and good will (i.e., group maintenance).*

Comparisons of Humour Across Sessions

As Figure 2 shows, the rate of humorous episodes observed in the study varies substantially from session to session. While the rates for Sessions 1 and 2 were below the mean rate, the rates for Sessions 4 and 6 were above average. The lowest rate of humour episodes was observed in Session 7. Rates for Sessions 8 and 9 rise above the mean rate and the rate for Session 10 falls below.

Excepting Sessions 1, 2, and 9, there are rate differences of at least 12 humorous episodes per hour between consecutive sessions.

Based on these observations it is hypothesized that:

The rate of humorous episodes will fluctuate over the life span of the group and an awareness of these fluctuations will contribute to the leader's understanding of the dynamics of the group.

Figure 3a shows a fairly even distribution of the rate of Humour Type 1&2 (that which facilitates both task achievement and group maintenance) across group sessions. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that: *The rate of humour which facilitates both the task and maintenance functions of the group will be fairly evenly distributed over all group sessions.* The rate of humour which facilitates both task and maintenance, therefore, is unlikely to be a significant correlate or indicator of the changing dynamics of a group.

Figure 3b shows considerable variation in the rate at which Humour Type 2 was observed over the ten group sessions. Very high rates of humour which facilitates group maintenance only, occurred in Sessions 4 and 10, while a very low rate was observed in Session 7. These observations give rise to the hypothesis that: *Humour of the type that facilitates group maintenance only is a sensitive indicator of the group's struggle to maintain cohesion, fellowship, and good will in times of crises (e.g., following emotional episodes and at termination).* This type of humour is likely to occur much less frequently when the group is "working" (e.g., as in Session 7).

Figure 3c shows a gradual increase in the rate of Humour Type 1 (that which facilitates task achievement only) from Sessions 4 through 9, with a decrease in Session 10. Since early group sessions were devoted to forming and storming and the final session to adjourning, it is hypothesized that: *Humour of the type that facilitates task achievement only is a sensitive indicator of a group which is performing or working.*

Figure 3d indicates that Humour Type D (that which diffuses one or both of group maintenance and task achievement) can occur at a relatively high rate under some circumstances. Type D humorous episodes were observed at a rate which was over 56 percent higher in Session 6 than all other sessions. Most of these Type D episodes featured humour which serves to facilitate group maintenance and diffuse task achievement. As Session 6 was devoted to the completion of unfinished business and to the consolidation of group norms, and since the group began to work at its hardest in Session 7, it is hypothesized that: *Humour of a type that facilitates group maintenance only but diffuses task achievement will be observed at an increasing rate as a group begins to move quickly from norming to performing.* Perhaps Type D humour functions to slow the group down when some members feel that it is moving too fast.

Figure 4 shows relatively high rates of mean positive impact for Sessions 4 and 9, and relatively low rates for Sessions 1, 2, and 7. Based on these observations it is hypothesized that: *The positive impact of humorous episodes will be relatively high during emotional periods and during termination, and relatively low in the first session or two of a group, and during periods when a group is working.*

Humour in the Context of Group Development Issues

Humour Type 2 (that which facilitates group maintenance only) was observed at its highest rate when the group appeared to be

forming (Sessions 2,3, & 4). Forty-five percent of the humorous episodes observed during the forming periods were of Humour Type 2. On the basis of this observation it is hypothesized that: *When a group is focusing upon the issues of forming, humour of a type that facilitates group maintenance only will be observed at a high rate.*

The rate of humorous episodes observed during periods when the group appeared to be storming was 41.6 episodes per hour, which is somewhat lower than the mean rate of 47.2 humorous episodes per hour. Apparently, storming is a serious matter, and this observation gives rise to the hypothesis that: *The rate at which humorous episodes occur in a group will significantly decrease during periods of storming.*

During group storming, 43.5 percent of the humour observed was of Humour Type 2 (that which facilitates group maintenance only), which translates to a relatively high rate of 18.1 Type 2 episodes per hour. This observation suggests the hypothesis that: *During periods of group storming humour of the type which facilitates group maintenance only will be observed at a high rate.*

A much higher than average rate of Humour Type D (that which diffuses one or both of group maintenance and task achievement) was observed when the group was norming. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that: *A relatively high rate of humour serving to diffuse one or both of group maintenance or task achievement will be observed during group norming.*

The rate of humorous episodes observed during periods when the

group appeared to be performing was 41.0 episodes per hour, which is somewhat lower than the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour over the life of the group. It is notable that Humour Type 1 (that which facilitates task achievement only) was observed at the relatively high rate of 17.2 episodes per hour during performing. On the basis of these observations it is hypothesized that: *The rate at which humorous episodes are observed in a group will decrease when the group is performing and those humorous episodes which do occur will be largely of the type that facilitates task achievement only.*

About 98 percent of the humorous episodes observed during those periods in which the group was concerned with adjourning were of Types 1, 2, and 1&2 (that is humour which facilitates both or one of task achievement and group maintenance). Furthermore, Humour Type D (that which diffuses one or both of group maintenance and task achievement) was observed at a very low rate. This observation suggests the hypothesis that: *The rate of humour having the effect of thwarting or diffusing either one or both of group task and maintenance functions will be very low when a group is dealing with adjournment issues.*

Comparisons of Humour Across Development Issues

The rate of humorous episodes was relatively undifferentiated across group development issues. On the basis of this observation it is hypothesized that: *The rate of humorous episodes observed in a*

self-study group will be relatively consistent across group development issues.

The rate of Type 1&2 humour (that which facilitates both task achievement and group maintenance) observed across development issues was relatively flat. This observation suggests the hypothesis that: *The rate of humour serving to facilitate both task and maintenance functions of a group will be relatively steady over group development issues.*

A relatively high rate of Humour Type 2 (that which facilitates group maintenance only) was observed during group forming, and relatively lower rates were observed during norming and performing. These data suggest the hypothesis that: *The rate of humour serving to facilitate group maintenance only will be relatively high during group forming, and relatively low during periods when the group is norming and performing.*

There were substantially higher rates of Type 1 humour (that which facilitates task achievement only) during performing and adjourning issues than during periods when the group appeared to focus on forming and storming issues. This observation suggests the hypothesis that: *The rate of humour serving to facilitate task achievement only will be relatively low during periods of group forming and storming, and relatively high during periods when group focus is on performing and adjourning.*

A higher rate of Type D humour (that which diffuses one or both of group maintenance and task achievement) occurred during

norming issues, and lower rates of this type occurred when the group appeared to be storming and adjourning. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that: *The rate of humour which diffuses one or both of group maintenance and task achievement will be highest during group norming issues and lowest during group storming and adjourning issues.*

Humour Within Session Quarters

The rate of humorous episodes observed in the first quarters of all sessions was 38.2 episodes per hour, which is somewhat lower than the mean rate of 47.2 episodes per hour averaged over all quarter sessions. Moreover, 60.5 percent of the humorous episodes observed in the first quarters were of Humour Type 2 (that which facilitates group maintenance only), which occurred at the very high rate of 23.1 episodes per hour. Based on these observations it is hypothesized that: *The rate of humour will be relatively low during the first quarter of a session, and much of the humour that does occur will serve to facilitate group maintenance only.*

Humour Type 1 (that which facilitates task achievement only) was observed at a very low rate in the first quarters. On the basis of this observation it is hypothesized that: *Humour serving to facilitate task achievement only will be observed at a relatively low rate in the first quarters of sessions.*

Humour Type 1 (that which facilitates task achievement only) was observed at a relatively high rate in the fourth quarters. Based

on this observation it is hypothesized that: *Humour serving to facilitate task achievement only will be observed at a relatively high rate during the fourth quarters of sessions.*

Comparisons of Humour Across Session Quarters

The rates of humour for quarters one and two are below the mean rate, and the rates for quarters three and four are above the mean rate. Based on this observation it is hypothesized that: *The rate of humour will be relatively low during the first half and relatively high during the last half of a session.*

The rate of Humour Type 1&2 (that which facilitates both task and maintenance) increased steadily through all quarters. This observation gives rise to the hypothesis that: *The rate of humour serving to facilitate both task achievement and group maintenance will increase steadily over session quarters.*

The rate of Type 2 humour (that which facilitates group maintenance only) was highest during the first quarters, dropped sharply in the second quarters, and then increased through quarters three and four. On the basis of this observation it is hypothesized that: *The rate of humour serving to facilitate group maintenance only will be relatively high in the first and last quarters, and relatively low in the second quarter of a session.*

The rate of Type 1 humour (that which facilitates task achievement only) increased steadily in quarters one through four. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that: *The rate of humour serving to*

facilitate task achievement only will increase steadily throughout a group session.

The rate of Type D humour (that which diffuses one or both of group maintenance or task achievement) was relatively steady over the four quarters of the sessions. Based on this observation it is hypothesized that: *The rate of humour serving to diffuse one or both of group maintenance and task achievement will be relatively steady through the four quarters of a session.*

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this research was to investigate the impact of humour on group functioning. As an exploratory study, its task was to generate hypotheses rather than test them. The results of the investigation are based on careful observations made of a single self-study group, with a unique composition, interacting in a unique setting, at a specific time in history. Accordingly, great care must be exercised in generalizing to other groups and settings. Indeed, all generalizations, implications, and suggested applications arising from the study should be acknowledged as speculative and hypothetical.

For purposes of the study, humorous episodes were operationally defined in terms of shared laughter. This definition is based on the assumption that when laughter is shared by two or more persons, the situation which elicited that laughter must be humorous. To the extent that laughter does not always indicate

humour and to the extent that humour may occur in the absence of laughter, the study is limited by the selected operational definition of humourous episodes.

The total observation time of 7.95 hours proved to be a limiting factor. During this time, Humour Types 1&4 (that which facilitates task and diffuses maintenance), 3 (that which diffuses task only), 4 (that which diffuses maintenance only) and 3&4 (that which diffuses both task and maintenance) occurred with such low frequencies that a meaningful analysis was not possible. Although these types were grouped together to constitute Type D (that which diffuses one or both of the task and maintenance functions of a group), a longer observation time might permit their meaningful separation.

The facilities used to view the group limited observations largely to what group members said over the course of the sessions. Although the audio reproduction was quite adequate for the purposes of this study, the videotaped recordings yielded very poor visual reproduction. Both the identification of humourous episodes and the accuracy of their classification may have been limited by this condition.

In a self-study group the boundaries for task and maintenance functions are not clearly defined. Indeed, a component of the group task is to deal with issues related to group process. In this study, observational difficulties occasionally arose concerning the identification of the effect of humourous episodes on the somewhat

vaguely defined task of the observed group.

Implications for the Practise of Counselling

The method used and results obtained from this study suggest a number of practical implications for Group Counselling, all of which, however, must be viewed as speculative and tentative.

The humour typology developed for this study provides a method for coding the impact of humour on group functioning. It may well prove to be a useful tool for group facilitators who wish to study the dynamics of their groups more carefully.

The study makes specific suggestions about the function of humour at different points over the life of a group. If humour can be expected to surface at certain times in specific forms over the course of group development, a greater sense of predictability might be founded upon the support or non-support of the hypotheses suggested.

It may be possible to develop a framework that could be used to assess group "health." The nature of humour in the observed group varied over sessions, stages of development, and session quarters. Monitoring the absense, or excess of particular humour types at specific points in group development might be a useful adjunct to understanding difficulties requiring intervention. If facilitators understand the impact that humour has on the group, and if they skillfully incorporate this information in their process commentaries, the result could be insightful and growth

facilitating.

The method used in this study to identify and code humorous exchanges offers observers a system for comparing their personal perceptions, thus increasing their group understanding. The humorous episode as evidenced by shared laughter, is specified as the component of group process to be focused upon. The taxonomy of humour type offers a mode for comparing perceptions of the effect that humour has on group dynamics.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study generates a number of hypotheses, all of which warrant further research attention. The verification of these hypotheses could be the focus of a number of future investigations.

Research could be directed toward improving the reliability of the rating system used in this study. This might be accomplished through the development of a set of descriptors outlining the specific criteria required to assign a humour episode to a particular type. This is important since raters must have a common understanding of what constitutes humour type.

The rating procedure might be expanded to include the group members' perceptions of the effect a particular humorous episode had on group function. This procedure could help to clarify whether or not the source of the shared laughter was humour, and provide a better indication of the effect that the humorous episode had on group function.

The taxonomy of humour type could be further developed. It may prove useful to distinguish between various subtypes of group maintenance and task achievement. The sharpening of this classification system could increase insight into important group processes.

Facilitator responses could be developed according to humour type, and used to promote group development. If group leaders can understand and incorporate appropriate humorous responses into their skill repertoire, this could be an effective mode of intervention.

There is a need for similar research to be replicated on other self-study groups, and also other types of groups in different settings. The question remains as to whether humour functions in a similar fashion in all groups, and how group goals effect humour function.

There is a need to investigate the relationship of humour to other important group dynamics. The observed frequencies of specific humour type might well be a 'barometer' of group health, productivity, perceptions of group safety, power issues, and other important group dynamics.

It has been suggested that groups develop their own specialized humour based on a their shared history (Fine, 1977). A question that warrants further investigation is the relationship between the characteristics of this humour specialization and group outcome. Particular themes of group specific humour may predispose groups

toward or away from "success" and may be an important indication of group needs at a particular point in development.

The relationship between humour and membership roles needs investigation. A study might be made of the function that humour serves for individual group members, the roles these members play, and the effect this has on other members. Careful observations of who initiates laughter, when, and who shares, or doesn't share in the interaction might provide valuable information on the nature of membership roles and the group power hierarchy. Group facilitators might use this information to better understand the dynamics of a particular group.

There should be further investigation into sex differences in the use of humour and its effect. Facilitators should be aware that a humorous episode may not effect all members the same way. An understanding of these differences would be helpful. Members could be asked to view the videotaped recordings of sessions, and give their perceptions of the use and effect of specific humour episodes.

There is the need for an investigation of the visual dimensions of group observation with respect to the effect of humour. This might attend to the possible relationship between humour and other visual cues such as body movement and eye contact.

Finally, the present study dictated a forced choice between humour having the effect of either facilitating or diffusing group function. Future investigations might try incorporating a neutral category into the humour typology. This would enable observers to

classify humour episodes according to whether they were perceived as facilitating, diffusing, or having no effect on the task and maintenance functions of the group.

In conclusion, the phenomenon of group humour warrants far greater attention than it has previously received. Humour appeared to be an important component of the life of the observed self-study group. In fact, shared laughter in this group occurred at a rate of one episode every 76 seconds. Since humour plays a part in most, if not all congregations of two or more persons, the study of humour provides a new "window" through which to view group dynamics.

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