The Influence of Graduate Advisor Use of Interpersonal Humor on Graduate Students

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The current study is the fourth in a series on various components of advisor-advisee communication. In the latest study, the influence of a variety of communication variables on the graduate advisor–advisee interpersonal relationship is examined. Graduate students' perceptions of their graduate advisors' use of humor as it relates to other communication variables (nonverbal immediacy, social support, mentoring, and relationship satisfaction) were investigated. Results revealed a positive, statistically significant relationship between an advisee's perception of his or her advisor's use of humor and that advisee's perception of the advisor's nonverbal immediacy, social support, and mentoring as well as the relationship satisfaction reported by the advisee.

KEY WORDS: Humor Assessment, Humor Orientation, nonverbal immediacy, mentor, satisfaction with advising, student perceptions of advising

Relative Emphasis: theory, research, practice

Understanding the influence of humor in both education and interpersonal relationships is a task that has been undertaken by a variety of different researchers (Richmond, Wrench, & Gorham, 2001). In 1940, Bousfield had students list traits that they perceived to be important in a college professor. Traits such as accomplishment in research, appearance, poise, and scholarly reputation were listed along with the ability to use humor. Bousfield's study was partially replicated by Check in 2001, and in the later study, humor was also listed among the desirable traits of college professors; in fact, the employment of humor in the college classroom was listed as the third most important trait of a college professor.

From an interpersonal communication perspective, humor is also extremely important. Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (1996) found that people who use humor during interpersonal interactions reported having more friendships than people who do not express humor. Aune and Wong (2002) found that when a participant perceived use of humor by a romantic partner, the participant esteemed the relationship more as well as experienced more positive emotion and satisfaction with the relationship than did participants whose romantic partner did not use humor. Wrench (2001) and Wrench and Martin (2001) also found a connection between an adolescent's perception of his or her parent's use of humor in teen-parent interactions and satisfaction with the relationship. In fact, the effect of using humor during interpersonal relationships has been studied in a variety of different contexts, and in all a positive effect on the relationship was found: teacher-student (Wanzer & Frymier, 1999b), superior-subordinate (Rizzo, Wanzer, & Booth-Butterfield, 1999), physician-patient (Wrench & Booth-Butterfield, 2003), coworkers (Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, & Booth-Butterfield, 2005), and many others. However, the graduate advisor–advisee relationship has only recently been examined for the usefulness of humor (Wrench & Punyanunt, 2005).

Unlike teacher-student relationships, the graduate advisor–advisee relationship contains functions of traditional classroom, interpersonal, and organizational communication (Wrench & Punyanunt, 2004). Ellis (1992) noted how graduate advisor–advisee relationships can impact advisees' classroom and professional success. However, very little research has analyzed the advisor-advisee relationship, and most of the research has focused on undergraduates rather than graduate students (Althaus, 1997; Gorham & Millette, 1997; Scott & Rockwell, 1997). To further understand the influence of humor on instructional communication in the advisor-advisee relationship, I discuss the history of the research into the communicative nature of humor and examine previous findings in graduate advisor-advisee communicative relationships.

History of Humor Communication Research

Categorizing Humor

Researchers and scholars have been attempting to understand the creation and effects of humor as far back as the feud between the Grecian Sophists and their most notable dissenters, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (McCroskey, Wrench, & Richmond, 2003). While the field of communication studies has

undergone a variety of name changes (rhetoric, elocution, speech communication, and communication studies), the communication of humor has remained a consistent topic of discussion. In 1955, Grimes created the first comprehensive theory for understanding the rhetorical process of communicated humor. She integrated writings from a variety of different philosophers and thinkers who have examined the concept of incongruity. Grimes's (1955b) theory was based on the notion that an incongruous relation between two objects causes an individual to experience mirth. Grimes based her theory on the writings of both traditional rhetorical thinkers such as Plato, Francis Bacon, Quintillian, and Joseph Priestly and thinkers not generally associated with writings about rhetoric, such as René Descartes, Blaise Pascal, H. J. Eysenck, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

In her follow-up article, Grimes (1955a) examined a variety of common humorous tools including the pun, the anecdote, and witticism. She committed much of her follow-up work to explaining the importance of the rhetorical climate or situation:

> Since acquired interests, knowledge, and attitudes govern individual responses to presented stimuli and in the dynamic interaction of the total situation established its affective tone, it is clear that the speaker who attempts humor must pay as much attention to the past experience of his audience as he does to the technical requirements of humor. In fact, he must realize that adequate information, in addition to certain attitudes and feelings of his listeners, will facilitate his bids for humor; and that, conversely, lack of familiarity with theme and language and different attitudes and feelings will inhibit humor or block it entirely. (Grimes, 1955a, pp. 248–49)

In essence, Grimes (1955b) argued that for humor to be effective, a speaker must know her or his audience. In her article, Grimes examined how different groups of people will respond to humorous messages based on current condition and past experience. While Grimes's (1955a, 1955b) research was interesting, the mirth experience theory did not generate a great deal of subsequent research.

The real burgeoning of communication-studies research into humor was undertaken during the late 1970s and increased throughout the 1980s. In these later studies, researchers focused primarily on how teachers use humor in the classroom.

While Grimes (1955a, 1955b) noted that speakers benefit from the use of it, humor as a component of education was not a common topic of discussion until the 1970s (Wanzer, 2002). Much of the early communication-studies research on humor was based on attempts at classifying verbal and nonverbal components of humor in the classroom and the effects of them on students. The first major classification scheme was created by Bryant, Comisky, and Zillmann (1979), who had 70 students unobtrusively audio record a teacher during class. These audio recordings were then analyzed and classified by humor category, relevance, sexual content, originator, and impact on victim and on education (see Appendix A for details on the categorical analysis). As a whole, this study indicated that teachers use a wide variety of different humor communication strategies in the classroom. Bryant et al. found that teachers tend to use nonsense humor that is not class related. In fact, most of the humor that was employed in the college classroom was not content relevant but instead helped create an affective learning environment.

While the Bryant et al. (1979) coding scheme for humor was the first to be employed in communication studies, other researchers have attempted to classify the different types of humor that are utilized in a college classroom. In fact, much of the work completed in communication studies during the 1980s and 1990s involved attempts to classify humorous verbal and nonverbal communication instances so that humor episodes could be coded and analyzed by researchers. Downs, Javidi, and Nussbaum (1988) broke humor down into two basic functional categories: play off and purpose (see Appendix A). The play-off category of humor was coded with regard to humor that was based on self (the teacher), a student, someone not in the class, course material, or some other existing phenomenon. The second category was based on whether the humor was relevant to the classroom setting. Downs et al. found that most of the humor in the classroom was content relevant and that the use of humor in a college classroom tends to decrease over the semester. At 9.3 instances in the 2nd week, the instances of humor dropped to 8.1 in the 6th week, and fell to 5.6 in the 10th week.

Another classification scheme for humor in the classroom was created by Gorham and Christophel (1990); they examined the influence that humor can have on nonverbal and verbal immediacy, which is the physical or psychological closeness perceived to exist between two people (e.g., a student's perception of closeness to a teacher). Gorham and Christophel classified 13 different types of humor that can be employed in the educational setting

(see Appendix A). They found that teachers who had employed humor in the classroom were perceived to have more verbal and nonverbal immediacy than teachers who did not use humor in the classroom.

Neuliep (1991) expanded Gorham and Christophel's (1990) scheme for analyzing humor in the classroom to 20 items (see Appendix A). Unlike the previous studies in which humor was examined in collegiate settings, Neuliep's (1991) study involved high school teachers' perceptions of the humor they use in the classroom. Neuliep sent out survey packets to 689 high school teachers in Brown County, Wisconsin, and asked them fill out a questionnaire. Teachers were asked about the types and frequencies of their humor use in the classroom. Award-winning teachers were found to use significantly more humor in the classroom than did teachers who had not won many awards. Teachers were also asked why they used humor in the classroom (Neuliep, p. 349):

1. Puts students at ease, relaxes them or loosens them up.
2. Attention getting device.
3. Shows teacher is human.
4. Helps keep class semi-forma.
5. Makes learning more fun.
5a. [*sic*] Serves as tension releaser.
6. Maintains student interest.
7. Helps illustrate a point.
8. Establishes rapport with students.
9. Helps students remember a point.
10. Change of pace/breaks up routine.

The latest major humor-coding scheme created by communication researchers has focused on student perceptions of inappropriate versus appropriate forms of humor in the classroom. Wanzer and Frymier (1999a) found that students clearly perceived there to be positive forms of humor (content-related humor or use of funny props) and humor that is clearly negative (making fun of students or swearing) (see Appendix A). Chesebro and Wanzer (2006) argued that teachers should never use students as the target of humor for fear that the wrong message will be communicated. While making fun of students is clearly negative, the use of sarcasm can be a double-edged sword in the classroom. Sarcasm can be a very positive form of humor when an individual's audience realizes that a comment is intended to be sarcastic; however, sarcasm is the most difficult form of humor for people to understand (Wanzer & Frymier, 1999a). These findings support Grimes's (1955a, 1955b) argument that humor must be perceived and understood from an audience member's perspective. In the classroom, the audience is comprised of students, so humor must be used with regard to how the students may perceive it.

The Humor Orientation

While humor classification systems are interesting and have helped researchers analyze various parts of the instructional communication process, the Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield's (1991) Humor Orientation (HO) instrument enabled communication scholars to initiate new lines of humor research. The scale developed for the HO was a "list of statements which directly reference the communicative use of humor in interpersonal situations" (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991, p. 208). Overall, the goal of the HO was to measure humorous enactments in interpersonal relationships. Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield defined a humorous enactment as "intentional verbal and nonverbal messages which elicit laughter, chuckling, and other forms of spontaneous behavior taken to mean pleasure, delight, and/or surprise in the targeted receiver" (p. 206). In essence, the clear stimulus-response pattern of humor is unidirectional. A source exhibits a humorous stimulus (e.g., making a funny face or telling a joke) to which a receiver has a clear response (e.g., smiling, giggling, or laughing). Humor creation and understanding, thus, is a symbolic process that is completed through verbal and nonverbal communication. An individual's perceptions of the degree to which an interactive partner engages in this symbolic process can be measured by the HO.

In the realm of HO research, people are commonly referred to as *high* or *low HO*. High HOs score on the upward end of the scale and regularly use humor as a tool for engaging in interpersonal relationships. Low HOs rarely, if ever, use humor as a tool for engaging in interpersonal relationships. While the scale was originally created to examine an individual's perception of his or her own behavior, the scale has been retooled to examine communicative behavior in a variety of different contexts: health care environments (Wanzer et al., 1996, 2005; Wrench & Booth-Butterfield, 2003), organizations (Rizzo et al., 1999; Wanzer et al., 2005), families (Wrench, 2001; Wrench & Martin, 2001), romantic relationships (Aune & Wong, 2002), and classrooms (Aylor & Oppliger, 2003; Frymier & Weser, 2001; Punyanunt, 2000; Wanzer & Frymier, 1999a, 1999b).

Wanzer and Frymier (1999b) conducted the first major study on the impact of the humor orientation of teachers. Utilizing a convenient college sample

and employing a technique originally devised by Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, and Richmond (1986), they asked students to critique the instructor for the class they had attended immediately prior to the one in which they were solicited for the study. This strategy allowed the researchers to maximize the number and variety of instructors in the sample.

Wanzer and Frymier (1999b) reported positive relationships between student perceptions of their teacher's humor orientation and affective learning ($r = .47$; $p < .001$) and cognitive learning ($r = .46$; $p < .001$). Furthermore, they analyzed learning with both student and teacher humor orientation scores for possible interaction effects. They found significant main effects for teacher but not for student humor orientations on affective and cognitive learning. They also found a positive relationship between students' perceptions of nonverbal immediacy and perceptions of teachers' humor orientations ($r = .61$; $p < .001$). Overall, the Wanzer and Frymier (1999b) study provided initial evidence about the importance of a teacher's humor orientation in the classroom.

In 2000, Punyanunt conducted a study examining the relationship between a teacher's humor orientation on her or his ability to use power-oriented strategies in the college classroom. Utilizing the Behavior Alteration Techniques and Behavior Alteration Messages scale (see Richmond & McCroskey, 1992), which is based on French and Raven's (1960) five power bases (coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, and referent), Punyanunt found a positive relationship between a student's perception of his or her teacher's humor orientation and that teacher's effective use of every behavior alteration technique. In essence, students perceive that humorous teachers have the ability to influence their students to a greater degree than teachers who are not humorous.

Frymier and Weser (2001) conducted a study examining the relationship between a student's level of communication apprehension (fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons) and that student's perception of teacher communication. The researchers found a negative relationship between a student's level of communication apprehension and her or his perception that a teacher should demonstrate verbal and nonverbal immediacy as well as be clear, humor oriented, and engaged in humorous behaviors. However, students who perceived that their teachers should use humor in the classroom also believed that their instructors should show verbal immediacy ($r = .24$; $p < .01$), nonverbal immediacy ($r = .16$; $p < .01$), and engage in humorous behaviors ($r = .22$; $p < .01$) in the classroom. This study indicates that many students believe teachers should possess a clear skill set; these finding are similar to those of Bousfield (1940) and Check (2001).

The last major study examining humor orientation in education was conducted by Aylor and Oppliger in 2003. The researchers set out to determine if a teacher's humor orientation could account for whether a student would initiate communication with a teacher outside of class. They were testing for a relationship between a teacher's humor orientation and students' likelihood to engage in both formal (interactions during office visits, E-mails, and phone calls) and informal (interactions around campus, in the halls during class breaks, or at campus events) out-of-class communication. A teacher's humor orientation was shown to be positively related to both a student's use of formal ($r = .22$; $p < .001$) and informal ($r = .35$; $p < .001$) out-of-class communication. Furthermore, Aylor and Oppliger reported that students' perceptions of their teachers' humor orientation was positively related to out-of-class communication satisfaction ($r = .37$; $p < .001$).

Humor Assessment

While a considerable amount of research has been conducted examining humor orientation in a variety of different contexts, in 2001, Wrench and McCroskey found a construct validity problem with the HO instrument. They noted that the HO does not measure the "communicative use of humor in interpersonal situations" but primarily measures an individual's use of jokes and humorous stories, which does not encompass all forms of humor. The different coding schemes created to examine humor in the classroom (Bryant et al., 1979; Downs et al., 1988; Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Neuliep, 1991; Wanzer & Frymier, 1999b) clearly indicate that there are more forms of humor other than joke and storytelling. As Wrench and Richmond (2004, p. 93) noted:

> If we relied on the scale created by M. Booth-Butterfield and S. Booth-Butterfield (1991), great comedic figures like Charlie Chaplin or Mr. Bean would not be rated as highly humor oriented because they did not talk. Instead, these two men would score in the bottom third of the scale simply because they used nonverbal behaviors to create humor oriented messages.

As a result of these observations, Richmond et al. (2001) created a generalized scale for examin-

ing the use of humor in interpersonal relationships. In a validation study of the Humor Assessment (HA), Wrench and McCroskey (2001) found that an individual's HO was more closely aligned with the biologically based variable of extraversion, while an individual's HA was more aligned with the culturally based variable of sense of humor. While Wrench and McCroskey found a moderate, positive relationship between an individual's HO and HA ($r = .51$; $p < .0001$), in a canonical correlation analysis, the two were shown to deviate as extraversion and sense of humor.

Wrench and Richmond (2004) examined the influence of teacher HA in the college classroom. Their study was designed to test the predictive validity of the HA. They found that a teacher's HA related to student perceptions of affective learning on class content ($r = .28$; $p < .0001$) and teacher affect ($r = .52$; $p < .0001$) levels, and a teacher's HA related to a student's cognitive learning ($r = .28$; $p < .0001$). These findings are similar to the results of Wanzer and Frymier (1999b) who used the Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) HO instrument.

Subsequently, Wrench and Richmond (2004) found a positive relationship between a teacher's HA, as assessed by students, and student perceptions of a teacher's nonverbal immediacy ($r = .46$; $p < .0001$) as well as a positive relationship between a student's motivation in a class and perceptions of his or her teacher's HA ($r = .24$; $p < .0001$). They also found that the teacher HA, as determined by students, was positively related to McCroskey and Teven's (1999) three factors of credibility: competence ($r = .39$; $p < .0001$), caring and goodwill ($r = .37$; $p < .0001$), and trustworthiness ($r = .28$; $p < .0001$).

Research surrounding the communicative nature of humor is still in its infancy and more understanding of the results is needed. The presented study contributes to the body of research as an exploration of the use of humor in the relationships of advisors and their graduate students.

Graduate Advisor–Advisee Relationships

Thousands of years ago, in Homer's epic, *The Odyssey*, the concept of a mentor was introduced. In *The Odyssey*, Homer describes how Ulysses pursues an adventure and selects his beloved friend, Mentor, to guide and supervise his son, Telemachus. In modern times, the word *mentor* has been used to describe a relationship in which one individual with more experience and knowledge, the mentor, assists another who has less knowledge and experience, the protégé (Richmond et al., 2001).

The mentor usually helps her or his protégé in personal and professional development (Johnson & Nelson, 1999). Mentoring can assist in the protégé's intellectual development, career expansion, and network establishment with other individuals in the field. The relationship helps to increase intrinsic rewards (e.g., satisfaction and a sense of confidence) and extrinsic rewards (e.g., more productivity, power, and increased visibility) for the mentor (Wright & Wright, 1987).

With a few recent exceptions (Hardy, 1994; Wrench & Punyanunt, 2004), the mentoring relationship between advisors and their graduate advisees has been rarely studied. In the late 1980s, Kram (1988) pointed out that graduate mentoring includes teaching, training, and socialization. Hill, Bahniuk, Hilton, and Dobos (1989) described mentoring as the innately communicative relationship in which a senior person advises and encourages a junior person's professional and personal development. They also stated that to have a successful advisor-advisee relationship, both parties must communicate effectively. Kram agreed, stating that mentoring tends to be found within strong interpersonal relationships in which both the mentor and protégé communicate effectively.

The advisor-advisee relationship is a crucial element in graduate education (Luna & Cullen, 1998). The effects of an advisor on a graduate student can be life altering. A great advisor can establish the ethics, determination, and skills for the advisee to become both a great teacher and researcher. Moreover, Faghihi (1998) found that advisees' relationships with their graduate advisors were significantly related to the advisees' dissertation progress. Students who regarded their advisors more positively progressed more rapidly than did students who regarded their advisors negatively. In addition, Coran-Hillix, Genshiemer, Coran-Hillix, and Davidson (1986) found that graduate students who had favorable mentors in graduate school produced more publications, conference papers, and first-authored papers, and they were also more productive after graduate school compared to those graduate students who did not have a mentor in their graduate program. All in all, the graduate advisor can influence the advisee's perception of graduate school and can impact learning, progress, and possibly future success. As the joke goes, the relationship between a graduate advisee and his or her advisor is more meaningful and lasts longer than most marriages.

In 2004, we initiated a new line of research to

examine the communicative nature of graduate advisor–advisee relationships. In *Advisor-Advisee Communication* (Wrench & Punyanunt, 2004), we found that the degree to which an advisee feels she or he is being mentored was positively related to advisee perceptions of that advisor's communication competence and perceived credibility. In addition, in this first study of the four-part series, we found that advisor immediacy was positively related to advisee perceptions of advisor competence, caring and goodwill, trustworthiness, and communication competence. We reported that advisees perceive more cognitive learning and have more effective advisor-advisee relationships with advisors who show nonverbal immediacy.

In *Advisor-Advisee Communication Two*, we found a negative relationship between verbal aggression (tendency to attack an individual using putdowns, such as attacks on intelligence, instead of an individual's arguments) and advisee perceptions of affective learning and advisor credibility (Wrench & Punyanunt, 2005). We also found a positive relationship between the advisee's assessment of his or her advisor humor and that advisee's perceptions of affective learning and advisor credibility.

In *Advisor-Advisee Communication III*, we analyzed the relationship between advisee perceptions of advisor's use of verbal aggression and conflict management strategies on advisee perceptions of advisor credibility (competence, caring and goodwill, and trustworthiness) (Punyanunt-Carter & Wrench, in press). First, we found that advisee perceptions of advisor credibility (competence, caring and goodwill, and trustworthiness) were positively related to advisee perceptions of advisor mentoring and an advisor's use of solution-oriented conflict management strategies. Second, we discovered that advisee perceptions of advisor trustworthiness were positively related to advisee perceptions of advisor use of nonconfrontational conflict-management strategies. Lastly, advisee perceptions of advisor competence were positively related to advisor use of control-oriented conflict management strategies.

Overall, the results from the first three *Advisor-Advisee Communication* studies are in line with previous literature in which teacher-student relationships have been examined. This result is unsurprising because the advisor-advisee relationship was expected to exhibit dynamics similar to those seen in previous immediacy studies in which teachers and students were examined in the traditional classroom setting (McCroskey & Richmond, 1992; Wanzer & Frymier, 1999b).

In this study, humor in the advisor-advisee communication relationship, as we initially discussed in 2005 is explored (Wrench & Punyanunt, 2005). Via the HA, we a) examined the advisee's perception of advisor use of humor, b) conducted an assessment of advisee perceptions of mentoring and advisor nonverbal immediacy, and c) looked at how these three predictor variables relate to advisee perceptions of relationship satisfaction with an advisor and the social support level in the relationship.

Based on the previous literature on advisor-advisee relationships and humor assessment, the following hypotheses were created:

H1: There will be a positive relationship between an advisee's perception of her or his advisor's use of humor and that advisee's perception of the advisor's nonverbal immediacy.
H2: There will be a positive relationship between an advisee's perception of his or her advisor's use of humor and the degree to which that advisee perceives that he or she has been mentored.
H3: There will be a positive relationship between an advisee's perception of her or his advisor's use of humor and that advisee's perception of social support in the advisor-advisee relationship.
H4: There will be a positive relationship between an advisee's perception of his or her advisor's use of humor and the level of relationship satisfaction reported by the advisee.

Methods

Participants

Participants were graduate students from around the nation gathered through Internet sites and listservs that have graduate student participants (e.g., CRTNET at www.natcom.org and the ICA-Net at www.icahdq.org). Participants were encouraged to forward the E-mail to any graduate student they thought might want to participate. When students linked to the Web site, they were given an initial letter discussing the use of human subjects, and they were then prompted to proceed to the survey. The volunteers were given the option of leaving their E-mail addresses so that they could learn the results of the study; 95% chose to provide their E-mail address. Except for the voluntarily provided E-mail addresses, no other personal information was solicited, so the participants were anonymous.

A total of 153 graduate students participated in the survey. The sample consisted of 84 (54.9%)

females and 66 (43.1%) males; 3 (2.0%) did not respond to the gender identity question. The mean age of the sample was 32.49 (SD = 8.83) years. The sample consisted of 9 (5.9%) first-year master's students in a 2-year program, 4 (2.6%) first-year master's students in a 1-year program, 24 (15.7%) second-year master's students in a 2-year program, 21 (13.7%) first-year doctoral students, 22 (14.4%) second-year doctoral students, 18 (11.8%) third-year doctoral students, 6 (3.9%) fourth-year doctoral students, 40 (26.1%) participants were ABD (all but dissertation), and 7 (4.6%) of the participants had completed their degrees within the last year and still were able to recall their relationship with their advisor.

Participants in this study came from a variety of academic fields: 10 (6.5%) arts, 16 (10.5%) business, 37 (24.2%) communication, 4 (2.6%) education, 6 (3.9%) English, 14 (9.2%) engineering, 4 (2.6%) physical sciences, 33 (21.6%) social sciences, and 23 (15.0%) other academic areas. Six participants did not respond to the question.

Basic demographic information was collected on the advisors. Participants were asked to report their advisors' gender and age: 110 (72.8%) of the participants were advised by males, 41 (27.2%) of the participants were advised by females, and 2 did not respond. A series of age ranges was provided to the participants who responded about their advisors as follows: 5 (3.3%) advisors were between the ages of 25 and 30 years, 32 (21.3%) advisors were between the ages of 31 and 40 years, 58 (38.4% advisors were between the ages of 41 and 50 years, 42 (27.8%) advisors were between the ages of 51 and 60 years, 13 (8.6%) advisors were over the age of 61 years, and 2 did not respond. Overall, the population of advisors was quite diverse, which allowed for a greater understanding of the advisor-advisee communication process.

Measures

Humor Assessment. The HA was developed to measure an individual's use of humor in interpersonal communication contexts and was originally published by Richmond et al. in 2001. Wrench and McCroskey (2001) examined the discriminant validity of the scale by examining how it differs from the previously used scale created by Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991). Wrench and Richmond (2004) then examined the psychometric properties of the scale and found that the scale was reliable and consisted of a single unrotated factor. For this study, the HA was reworded for use in examining an advisor's HA as determined by the advisee (see Appendix B for the HA used in this study). The HA is a 16-item, self-report measure in a 5-point Likert format ranging from 1 *strongly disagree* to 5 *strongly agree*. Scores for the HA can range from 16 to 80. In this sample, the range was from 24 to 80. The HA had an alpha reliability of .96 (M = 57.09; SD = 12.97).

Graduate Student Mentoring scale. We developed the Graduate Student Mentoring scale (Wrench & Punyanunt, 2004) based on the Hill et al. (1989) Mentoring and Communication Support scale, which is a means for assessing a superior's ability to mentor a subordinate in a corporate organization. The scale consists of 10 Likert-type items with a range from 1 *strongly disagree* to 5 *strongly agree*. Scores on the Graduate Student Mentoring scale can range from 10 to 50; the values in this study fell in this range. The Graduate Student Mentoring scale had an alpha reliability of .94 (M = 34.08; SD = 9.57).

Advisor immediacy behavior. The Self-Report of Immediacy Behavior (SRIB) was created by Richmond and McCroskey (1995) to measure an individual's nonverbal immediacy. For this study, the SRIB was retooled to measure an advisee's perception of her or his advisor's nonverbal immediacy. The SRIB consists of a series of 16 Likert-type items with a scale of 1 *strongly disagree* to 5 *strongly agree*. Scores for the SRIB can range from 16 and 80. In this sample, the range was from 18 to 77. The SRIB used in this study yielded an alpha reliability of .88 (M = 57.09; SD = 9.80).

Relational social support. The Relational Social Support scale was originally created by Glynn, Christenfeld, and Gerin (1999) to measure the degree to which patients felt they received social support from a lab technician during an experimental procedure. The original scale consisted of six semantic-differential items (helpful-unhelpful, supportive-unsupportive, accepting-rejecting, close-distant, warm-cold, and friendly-unfriendly). While the first three items are clearly support oriented, the latter three items are terms more reflective of satisfaction. For the purposes of the current study, a distinction between support and satisfaction was made, so five additional items were created. Overall, the new scale consisted of eight semantic differential items: supportive-unsupportive, responsive-unresponsive, helpful-unhelpful, good listener–bad listener, accepting-rejecting, open-minded–closed-minded, sensitive-insensitive, kind-cruel.

To test the psychometric properties of the new scale, a principal component factor analysis was conducted. Three criteria were used to determine the

number of factors to rotate: sampling adequacy, the scree test, and the interpretability of the factor solution. To examine sampling adequacy, Kaiser's measure of sampling adequacy was used and a .93 rating was obtained; this value is considered marvelous for a factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974). The scree plot clearly indicated only one primary factor and only one factor with an eigenvalue above 1, which accounted for 81.67% of the variance.

As a follow-up procedure and a means to further investigate the structure of the eight item measure, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. Results indicated that the proposed structural model fit the data well, χ^2 (20, N = 151) = 105.97; $p < .0005$. All the goodness-of-fit indices exceeded the threshold levels (over .95): normed fit index = .98; comparative fit index = .98; relative fit index = .96; incremental index of fit = .98; and the Tucker-Lewis index = .97. The calculated confirmatory factor analysis estimates for each of the items can be found in Table 1. Scores for the Relational Support scale can range from 8 to 56, and like values were seen in this study. The Relational Support scale yielded a .97 alpha reliability (M = 43.38; SD = 11.19).

Relational Satisfaction scale. The Relational Satisfaction scale was created by Beatty and Dobos (1992) to measure the extent to which an individual is satisfied with his or her interpersonal relationship with another individual. The scale consists of six oppositely worded adjective pairs, and it has seven steps. For this study, advisees were asked to rate their relational satisfaction with their advisors. Scores on the Relational Satisfaction scale can range from 5 to 35, and these scores were seen in this study. The Relational Satisfaction scale yielded a .98 alpha reliability (M = 26.98; SD = 8.02).

Results

In the first hypothesis, a positive relationship was predicted between an advisee's perception of her or his advisor's use of humor and that advisee's perception of the advisor's nonverbal immediacy. To analyze this hypothesis, a Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated. A positive relationship was found between an advisee's perception of his or her advisor's use of humor and that advisor's level of nonverbal immediacy, r (151) = .60; $p < .0005$. The correlations for all of the study variables can be seen in Table 2.

Table 1 Calculated correlation estimates for the Relational Support scale: Indices of fit

Item	Calculated Estimates
Supportive-unsupportive	.90
Responsive-unresponsive	.90
Helpful-unhelpful	.90
Good Listener–bad listener	.89
Accepting-rejecting	.90
Open-minded–closed-minded	.89
Sensitive-insensitive	.87
Kind-cruel	.86

In the second hypothesis, a positive relationship was predicted between an advisee's perception of her or his advisor's use of humor and the degree to which an advisee perceives to have been mentored by the advisor. To analyze this hypothesis, a Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated. A positive relationship was found between an advisee's perception of his or her advisor's use of humor and the degree to which that advisee perceives to have been mentored, r(151) = .49; $p < .0005$.

In the third hypothesis, a positive relationship was expected between an advisee's perception of her or his advisor's use of humor and that advisee's perception of social support in the advisor-advisee relationship. To analyze this hypothesis, a Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated. A positive relationship was found between an advisee's perception of his or her advisor's use of humor and that advisee's perception of social support in the advisor-advisee relationship, r(144) = .48; $p < .0005$.

The fourth hypothesis was used to predict if a positive relationship exists between an advisee's perception of her or his advisor's use of humor and the level of relationship satisfaction reported by the advisee. To analyze this hypothesis, a Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated. A positive relationship was found between an advisee's perception of his or her advisor's use of humor and the level of relationship satisfaction reported by the advisee, r(149) = .51; $p < .0005$.

Using structure equation modeling, we examined the relationships between three endogenous variables (humor assessment, nonverbal immediacy, and mentoring) and the exogenous variable, relationship fulfillment, which had two endogenous indicators (relationship satisfaction and social support). The hypothesized model is presented in Figure 1. Circles represent latent variables, and rectangles represent measured variables. Absence of a line between variables implies lack of a hypothesized relationship. The structural equation model was calculated using AMOS version 4.0 (Arbuckle, 1999).

Table 2 Variable relationships as determined by Pearson product-moment correlation

	Advisor humor assessment	Advisor nonverbal immediacy	Degree of mentoring	Relationship satisfaction
Advisor humor assessment				
Advisor nonverbal immediacy	.60			
Degree of mentoring	.49	.36		
Relationship satisfaction	.51	.44	.71	
Social support	.48	.45	.69	.84

Note. $p < .0005$.

Results indicated that the proposed structural model fit the data quite well, χ^2 (2, N = 151) = 2.01; p = .37. All the goodness-of-fit indices far exceeded the recommended levels: normed fit index = .99; comparative fit index = 1.0; relative fit index = .99; incremental index of fit = 1.0; and the Tucker-Lewis index = 1.0. All of the indices of fit were over the .95 mark, as recommended by Byrne (2001), which indicates that the model proposed is a superior fit. The structural equation model with standardized estimates is displayed in Figure 2.

Discussion

Our primary goal in this study was to examine how interpersonal communication variables, such as humor, influence the advisor-advisee relationship. To examine the results found in this study, we examined how the interpersonal communication variables (nonverbal immediacy, social support, mentoring, and relationship satisfaction) used in this study related to perceived advisee learning, the effectiveness of the advisor-advisee relationship, and perceived mentoring levels. Correlation findings are discussed in light of the structural equation model findings.

Correlation Findings

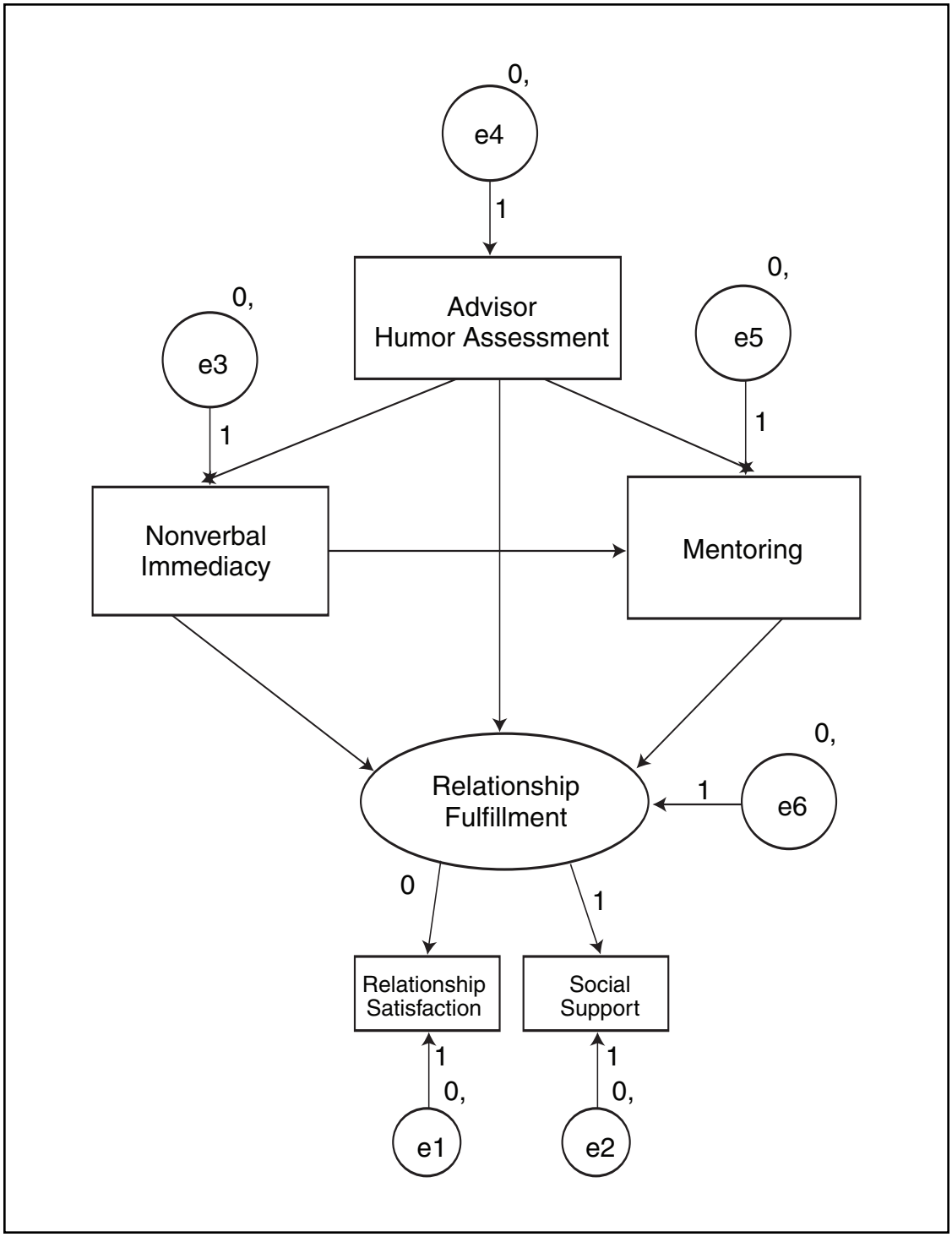
Nonverbal immediacy. The first important set of findings in this study related to the relationship between humor and nonverbal immediacy. Andersen, Andersen, and Jensen (1979) found a relationship between immediacy and relational closeness. McCroskey and Richmond (1992) have illustrated relationships between teacher's nonverbal immediacy and students' positive evaluations of the teacher. The results related to H1 revealed a statistically significant relationship between humor and nonverbal immediacy, which had been seen in a study in which Wrench and Richmond (2000, 2004) studied student perceptions of teacher humor and nonverbal immediacy. These results indicate that humor can impact nonverbal immediacy in the advisor-advisee relationship.

Mentoring. The second hypothesis was used to look at the relationship between an advisee's perception of her or his advisor's use of humor and the degree to which that advisee perceives to have been mentored. Results revealed a statistically positive significant relationship between humor and mentoring. Although, the relationship was moderate, it indicates that humor is sometimes used in the mentoring process. This finding reinforces our previous findings (Wrench & Punyanunt, 2004): Positive communicative behaviors are extremely important in the mentoring relationship. In essence, more time and attention may be necessary to train potential graduate advisors on communication skills before they become mentors to graduate advisees.

Social support. A positive relationship between an advisee's perception of his or her advisor's use of humor and that advisee's perception of social support in the advisor-advisee relationship was found in the examination of the third hypothesis. Research on social support reveals a positive relationship between social support and emotional well-being (Burleson, Albrecht, & Sarason, 1994). Research has also shown that social support can reduce stress and increase feelings of positive self-concept (Ganster & Victor, 1988). In the graduate advisor–advisee relationship, a sense of support between the advisee and her or his advisor is critical. Many of the horror stories of unhealthy advisor-advisee relationships are based on a lack of social support and situations in which the advisee ends up being abused by his or her advisor. The finding that the positive communicative behavior, humor, adds to an advisee's perception of social support further validates the idea that advisors need to use humor with advisees.

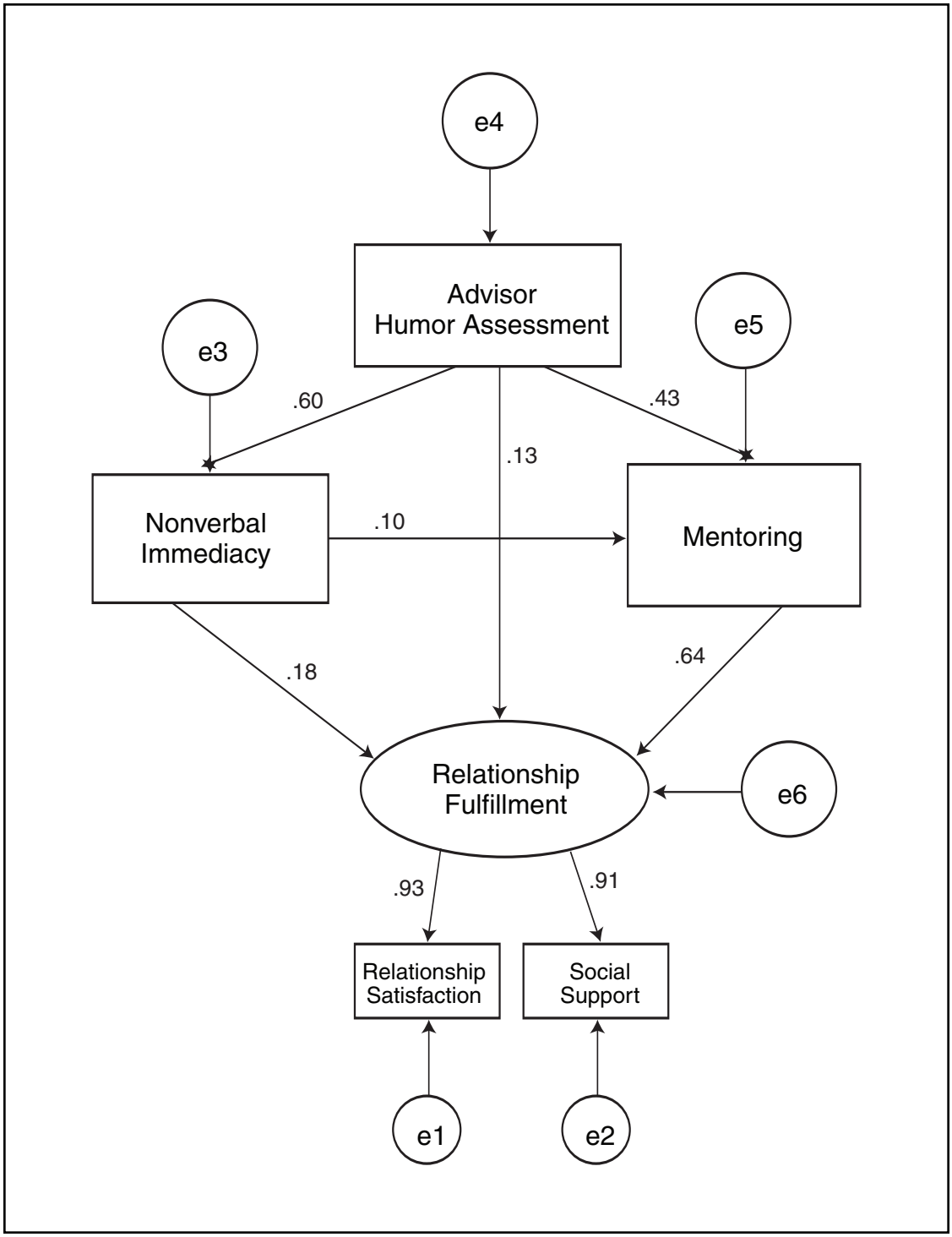
Relationship satisfaction. The relationship between an advisee's perception of her or his advisor's use of humor and the level of relationship satisfaction reported by the advisee was examined through the fourth hypothesis. Results indicate a relationship between an advisee's perception of his or her advisor's use of humor and that advisee's satis-

Figure 1 Proposed structural equation model of advisor communicative behaviors as perceived by advisee



Note. The "e" refers to error terms. The calculation of error terms is one of the biggest differences between structural equation modeling and path analysis.

Figure 2 Structural equation model with calculated estimates



faction with the advisor-advisee relationship. Hinde (1997) believed that satisfaction is related to communication and the attributes of the communication. Based on the current study, the type of communication (e.g., humor) is associated with satisfaction. Hence, humor can increase the satisfaction levels of participants in advisor-advisee relationships.

Structural Equation Model Results

According to Wrench, Thomas-Maddox, Richmond, and McCroskey (2008), structural equation modeling is concerned with examining observed and latent variables. An observed variable is one that can be directly collected by the researcher; a latent variable is one that cannot be directly measured but is used based on the belief that the measurements of related variables help to understand the target latent variable. In the current study, advisor humor assessment, nonverbal immediacy, and mentoring all represent observed variables. However, the latent variable, relationship fulfillment, was not directly observed in the study but was measured by examining the combination of relationship satisfaction and social support.

In addition to examining observed and latent variables, structural equation modeling allows researchers to examine the relationship between endogenous and exogenous variables. According to Wrench et al. (2008), endogenous variables "are explained by one or more of the other variables in the model" and exogenous variables "are taken as a given, so the model does not try to explain them" (pp. 422–23).

The structural equation model proposed in this study had three exogenous variables (humor assessment, nonverbal immediacy, and mentoring) and one endogenous variable titled "relationship fulfillment," which had two exogenous indicators (relationship satisfaction and social support). The model seen in Figure 1 is based on the proposal that advisee perceptions of advisor humor could be used to predict advisee perceptions of advisor nonverbal immediacy and advisee perceptions of the degree to which they are mentored; calculated estimates yielded .60 and .43 respectively for these indicators (Figure 2). Advisee perceptions of advisor nonverbal immediacy were thought to predict advisee perceptions of the degree to which they are mentored (.10) (Figure 2).

The proposed model was then used to examine the three endogenous variables and their ability to predict the newly created exogenous variable of relationship fulfillment. The exogenous variable was theorized to be indicative of a strong relationship between social support (.91) and relationship satisfaction (.93). While the correlation between social support and relationship satisfaction was .84, the two items were strongly related to the exogenous variable created in this study. The endogenous variables humor assessment (.13), nonverbal immediacy (.18), and mentoring (.64) significantly predicted portions of the variance in relationship fulfillment. See Figure 2.

While humor assessment and nonverbal immediacy only minimally predicted the variance in relationship fulfillment, mentoring was shown to be highly related to relationship fulfillment. Based on these findings, it can be argued that while humor assessment and nonverbal immediacy impact perceptions of mentoring, humor assessment and nonverbal immediacy do not have an important impact on perceptions of relationship fulfillment. However, an advisee's perception of her or his advisor as a mentor impacts the degree of fulfillment the advisee experiences in the advisor-advisee relationship. While communication is important in creating a sense of mentoring, the perception of mentoring determines whether an advisee ultimately feels to have a useful and fulfilling relationship with the advisor.

Limitations

A few limitations must be discussed with regard to this study. First, the participants were not randomly selected, and so the sample could influence the results; that is, it may not be representative of the entire population of graduate students. At the same time, because participants volunteered from a variety of academic disciplines, the study results reflect graduate advisor–advisee mentoring relationships in a more general way than if participants had come from a specific academic field. Because the goal was to examine how interpersonal communication influences graduate advisor–advisee relationships, the broader scope of participants allows for a broader understanding of this interpersonal relationship.

The second limitation to this study concerns the measures that have been used in instructional contexts other than graduate schools. The type of mentoring and the selection process of mentors vary from previous studies examining other types of mentoring. Advising and mentoring activities for graduate students can range from helping the advisee select a course of study and prepare a graduate thesis or dissertation to collaboration on research and guidance on teaching specific specializations. In other words, the graduate mentor-

ing relationship is dynamic and can include or omit a number of characteristics not present in other traditional student-teacher relationships.

Conclusion

This investigation furthers research on advisor-advisee communicative relationships. Results reveal a positive statistically significant relationship between an advisee's perception of his or her advisor's use of humor and the level of nonverbal immediacy, social support, mentoring, and relationship satisfaction reported by that advisee.

In Wrench and Punyanunt (2004, 2005) and Punyanunt-Carter and Wrench (in press), we initiated the advisor-advisee line of research to understand and help train advisors in effective and affective communication techniques when interacting with their advisees. Advisor-advisee relationships are rarely researched and represent a line of communication research that should be further investigated. Future avenues of research should include areas such as organizational identification and assimilation, conflict management, additional interpersonal and instructional communication variables as well as other factors that could impact the advisor–advisee relationship.

Furthermore, the examination of humor in a variety of interpersonal relationships from teachers and students to advisors and advisees helps scholars understand how the use of humor affects peoples' lives on a daily basis. Researchers in this area may want to focus on undergraduate advisor–advisee relationships and how humor is similar to or different from those between graduate students and advisors. Humor can also be examined between coworkers, peers, and others in on-campus interpersonal relationships.

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Appendix A Categorical schemes employed by humor educational researchers in communication

Bryant, Comisky, & Zillmann (1979)

I. Humor Categories
   - A. Joke
   - B. Riddle
   - C. Pun
   - D. Funny story
   - E. Humorous comment
   - F. Other

II. Spontaneity of Humor
   - A. Prepared
   - B. Spontaneous
   - C. Indeterminable

III. Impact on Education
   - A. Distracted from the educational point
   - B. Neither distracted from nor contributed to the educational point
   - C. Contributed to the educational point

IV. Relevance
   - A. Not at all related
   - B. Moderately related
   - C. Extremely related

V. Other Factors
   - A. Sexual
     1. Nonsexual hostile
     2. Sexual nonhostile
     3. Sexual hostile (put downs with sexual content)
   - B. Originator
     1. Instructor
     2. Student
     3. Other character
   - C. Victim Impact
     1. Self-disparagement
     2. Student disparagement
     3. Other disparagement

Downs, Javidi, & Nussbaum (1988)

I. Play Offs
   - A. Self
   - B. Students
   - C. Others not in class
   - D. Course material
   - E. Other

II. Purpose
   - A. Relevant to course
   - B. Not relevant to course

Appendix A Categorical schemes employed by humor educational researchers in communication (continued)

Gorham & Christophel (1990)

I. Brief comment about a student
II. Brief comment about a whole class
III. Brief comment about the university, department, or state
IV. Brief comment about national or world events, famous personalities, or popular culture
V. Brief comment related to a topic, subject, or class procedure
VI. Self-deprecating comment
VII. Personal anecdote or story related to the content
VIII. Personal anecdote or story not related to the content
IX. General anecdote related to content
X. General anecdote not related to content
XI. Joke
XII. Nonverbal humor
XIII. Other

Neuliep (1991)

I. Teacher Targeted Humor
  A. Humorous teacher self-disclosure that is content related
  B. Humorous teacher self-disclosure that is not content related
  C. Humorous teacher self-disclosure that is embarrassing
  D. Teacher role plays a humorous character related to class content
  E. Teacher role plays a humorous character not related to class content
  F. Teacher uses self-deprecating humor
II. Student Targeted Humor
  A. Teacher makes a joke out of a student's error or mistake
  B. Teacher mildly insults a student in a friendly manner
  C. Teacher teases a student in a friendly manner
  D. Teacher has a student role play something that is humorous
III. Untargeted Humor
  A. Teacher points out an incongruity or awkward comparison
  B. Teacher tells a joke
  C. Teacher uses a play on words or pun
  D. Teacher engages in witty interaction, uses exaggerated analogies, or "B.S.'s" with students
IV. External Source Humor
  A. Teacher relates a humorous event in history
  B. Teacher brings in an example of something humorous created by another person (e.g., cartoon, incident on TV, or other tangible product) related to the content
  C. Teacher brings in an example of something humorous created by another person (e.g., cartoon, incident on TV, or other tangible product) not related to the content
  D. Teacher demonstrates a natural phenomenon that students find humorous
V. Nonverbal Humor
  A. Teacher makes a funny face to the class
  B. Teacher uses her or his body to illicit a humorous response

Appendix A Categorical schemes employed by humor educational researchers in communication (continued)

Wanzer & Frymier (1999a)

I. Appropriate
   - A. Content-related humor
   - B. Humor not related to content
   - C. Impersonation
   - D. Nonverbal behaviors
   - E. Disparaging humor
   - F. Humorous props
   - G. Sarcasm
   - H. Unintentional humor

II. Inappropriate
   - A. Making fun of a student
   - B. Humor-based stereotypes
   - C. Failed humor
   - D. Sexual humor
   - E. Irrelevant humor
   - F. Sarcasm
   - G. Swearing
   - H. Joking about serious issues
   - I. Personal humor (inside jokes)
   - J. Sick humor

Appendix B Advisor Humor Assessment

Instructions: Below are several descriptions of how your advisor may communicate. Please use the scale below to rate the degree to which each statement applies to your advisor's communication. Remember, we want you to be completely honest and we appreciate your cooperation.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

_____ 1. My advisor regularly communicates with others by joking with them.
_____ 2. People usually laugh when my advisor makes a humorous remark.
_____ 3. My advisor is not funny or humorous.
_____ 4. My advisor can be amusing or humorous without having to tell a joke.
_____ 5. Being humorous is a natural communication orientation for my advisor.
_____ 6. My advisor cannot relate an amusing idea well.
_____ 7. My friends would say that my advisor is a humorous or funny person.
_____ 8. People don't seem to pay close attention when my advisor is being funny.
_____ 9. Even funny ideas and stories seem dull when my advisor tells them.
_____ 10. My advisor can easily relate funny or humorous ideas to the class.
_____ 11. I would say that my advisor is not a humorous person.
_____ 12. My advisor cannot be funny, even when asked to do so.
_____ 13. My advisor relates amusing stories, jokes, and funny things very well to others.
_____ 14. Of all the people I know, my advisor is one of the "least" amusing or funny persons.
_____ 15. My advisor uses humor to communicate in a variety of situations.
_____ 16. My advisor does not communicate with others by being humorous or entertaining.

To score this research measure, first reverse code items 3, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, & 16. Scores should range between 16 and 80. Scores over 55 are considered high and those below 55 are considered low.

The Humor Assessment has reported alpha reliabilities of .95 for the teacher version (Wrench & Richmond, 2004), .90 (Wrench & McCroskey, 2003) for the individual trait version, and .96 for the advisor version (Wrench & Punyanunt, 2005).