HUMOR IN RHETORIC: AN ANALYSIS OF AUDIENCE LAUGHTER IN TOASTMASTERS' SPEECHES

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Humor in Rhetoric: An Analysis of Audience
Laughter in Toastmasters' Speeches

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Statement of Originality

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution. In addition, I declare that to the best of my knowledge, this thesis is free of plagiarism, and contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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This thesis contains material from 9 papers presented at international conferences, published in an Abstract form, in which I am listed as an author.


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SUMMARY

This study investigated how humor was used as rhetoric in winning Toastmasters' speeches. Audience laughter was analyzed as a behavioral variable to make inferences on the theoretical constructs of rhetoric and humor. In this study, rhetorical humor (or interchangeably humor-rhetoric) was specified as the effective use of logos, pathos, ethos that elicited in an audience the embodied cognition of semiotic play. Underpinned by the analytical approaches of social semiotics and psychodynamics, seven interrogation questions were inquired to comprehensively examine how humor was used as rhetoric in 57 Toastmasters’ speeches (T = 401 mins 28 secs) at the 2012 to 2017 World Championship of Public Speaking® (WCPS®). The seven questions were:

1. When, as expressed by Embodied Cognition, was humor rhetorical?
2. Where was the rhetorical humor Located?
3. Who Produced (& who Consumed) the rhetorical humor?
4. Which Semiotic Mode triggered the rhetorical humor?
5. What Technique generated the rhetorical humor?
6. Whom did the rhetorical humor Target?
7. Why did the rhetorical humor Appeal?

In the 57 WCPS® speeches (\(\bar{t} = 7\) mins 03 secs) analyzed, there were 873 unique laughter instances by the sitting-audience, of which 262 were operationalized as humor-rhetoric moments (i.e. laughter instances of at least 2000ms) for further scrutiny. With every increase in a minute interval, there was a significant increase in the percentage of laughter instances being humor-rhetoric moments, \(p < .001\). The longer that a competing finalist at the World Championship of Public Speaking®
spoke, the more likely that audience laughter would persist for at least 2000ms. I discussed that, plausibly, as a rhetoric progressed in time, the propensity for laughter moments could naturally manifest easier when trust in a speaker’s agenda had been steadily built.

The locational setting and the relational setting, however, mostly impacted rhetorical humor in a qualitative manner that quantitative analysis cannot capture. In 225 of the 262 humor-rhetoric moments observed (i.e. 85.8%), laughter moments were elicited by the semiotic play of words, images, and sound, co-occurring. The 262 laughter moments were thematically observed to be *commonly* generated by (i) play with meanings, (ii) appropriate incongruity, and (iii) wit in mockery, as well as *distinctly* generated by 40 of the 41 audiovisual humor Techniques particularized by Buijzen & Valkenburg (2004). In particular, the *distinctive* Techniques of ‘Conceptual Surprise’, ‘Exaggeration’ and ‘Irony’ were the top three strategic means most frequently used to generate laughter moments in the 57 speeches analyzed. Findings also indicated that the content of the 262 humor-rhetoric moments most strikingly jabbed at an individual (n = 151), people (n = 59), and ideas (n = 52) for laughter. In addition, how humor-rhetoric Appealed, in terms of humor-*logos*, humor-*pathos*, and humor-*ethos*, was deconstructed. Based on the recurring motifs that surfaced in the data analyzed, I explained that humor appealed rhetorically for the individuals who laughed when a shift in cognition brought affective pleasure to enlarge a laughers’ ego. I drew attention to 13 emotional routes for an individual to feel pleasure in laughter and argued that idiosyncratic laughter moments were driven by impulsive instincts that moralistic ideals did not inhibit.
Chapter 1:
Introduction

Prologue

In 2008, at age 18, I was a sitting-audience in the “Red, White, and Brown” Stand-up Comedy Show by Russell Peters\(^1\). People around me were readily laughing, but I found it difficult to authentically do so. Was it because I lacked a sense of humor? I felt emotionally empty after the show. I was mystified by humor and laughter. What is it about humor that stimulates people to genuinely erupt into involuntary laughter?

A 3 min 50 secs segment of the show, titled "Indians are Cheap", is available here (please see: [http://bit.ly/ntuphd_RP2008](http://bit.ly/ntuphd_RP2008)). The Closed Captions (CC) below were the exact English language transcriptions, as provided by the official Russell Peters YouTube Channel.

| Russell Peters: Look at all these Indian faces, Jesus Christ! [Laughter] Look at you, brown **bastards, goddamn**! [Laughter] Indians just look upset, that they had to spend money, to be here tonight, don't cha? [Laughter and Clapping] Just the look, on their face, just-- [Laughter] [Indian accent] "This is bullshit!" [Laughter] "I don't know, why I'm spending money, to see someone, that looks just like me!" [Laughter and Clapping] [Whistle] [Laughter continues] "I can stay home and look in the mirror." [Laughter] "For free!" [Laughter] We are an endless supply, of "cheap" jokes! [Laughter] You know what the best thing about it is? Indian people, we’re proud of our cheapness! You're never gonna insult us, by calling us cheap,

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\(^1\) Russell Peters was born and raised in Canada and his father was born in India. The full “Red, White, and Brown” show is available to be seen here: [bit.ly/ntuphd_RP_part1](bit.ly/ntuphd_RP_part1) + [bit.ly/ntuphd_RP_part2](bit.ly/ntuphd_RP_part2).
that's the best part, you know? [Applause] You can walk up to an Indian, "You guys are cheap!" [Indian accent] "Thank you for noticing, thank you." [Laughter and Applause] "Thank you, very much, thank you." [Laughter and Clapping] [Normal voice] "That guy just called you cheap!" [Indian accent] "No, no, no..." "He pronounced it 'cheap,' but what he was saying, was, 'smart.' [Laughter] "Very 'smart,' he was saying." [Laughter] We're cheap. We're-- you know what, here's the thing-- It's not like I'm up here going, "YOU Indian people are cheap, and I'm the one that's not." No, no, no, no, no. [Laughter] [Indian accent] No, NO, no, no, no, no. [Laughter] [Normal voice] I'm just as fuckin cheap, as you! [Laughter] The difference is, now, I have money! [Laughter] I'm just cheap, in better stores!

[Laughter] I'll be looking, at like, an Armani shirt-- I hate when this happens. I'm looking at a shirt, from like, a high-end designer, and I flip the tag over, and I see, "Made in India." I'm stuck with a real dilemma, I'm like, "Shit!" [Laughter] "Do I buy this?" [Laughter] "Or do I call my uncle?" [Laughter and Applause] "I wonder if he knows, where this factory is..." [Laughter] We are cheap. Everybody's cheap, aren't they? Never call white people cheap. White people get really upset, when you call them cheap. You ever called white person cheap? They get very angry. Cause white people, actually, are probably, the only people that aren't cheap. You ever call a white guy cheap? "You're cheap." [Douchey voice] "Fuck you, I'm cheap!" "I'll buy you a beer. You want a beer?" [Laughter] That's how white guys get around, being cheap! [Douchey voice] "You want a beer? You want a beer? You want a beer? You want a beer? You want a beer? You want a beer? Huh? You want a beer?" "Fuck you, I'm not cheap, I bought everybody beer!" [Laughter] Everybody's cheap - it's all about levels, you know? Black people are cheap as shit, and I'll tell you why, because I know-- I grew up around enough black people, to know exactly how cheap you are. I remember going, to my best friend Marlon's house, when I was a kid. [Russell
chuckles] I'd go there, and be like, "Hey Marlon, can I have some cereal?" [Cool
guy voice] "Yeah, go ahead, help yourthelf." [Laughter] Here’s the thing, Marlon,
and I, have been friends for 31 years. Best friends, for 31 years and I didn't realize
he had a lisp-- [Laughter] until I did an impression of him. [Laughter] Like, "Can I
get some cereal?" [Marlon's voice] "Yeah, go ahead, help yourthelf." [Laughter] I
was like, "Son of a bitch, he has a lisp!" [Laughter] So, I go pour some cereal, I got
to get the milk-- I'm like, "Yo! You only got this much milk left!" [Marlon's voice]
"Ah, shit." [Laughter] "(Alr)ght, gimme the jug, I'll make some more." [Audience
groaning, in disgust, laughing, and clapping] [Normal voice] "What do you mean
you'll, 'make some more?'" [Laughter] He takes the jug of milk, shoves it under the
sink, and starts filling it with water! I'm like, "Yo, this barely looks like milk!"
[Marlon's voice] "It's 'thkim' milk." [Laughter and Applause] ♪♪ (t = 3 min 50
secs) |

The verified Russell Peters YouTube Channel mindfully embedded all of the 34
[Laughter] instances, in their uploaded Closed Captions, for a global audience to
see. During this highlighted rhetoric (t = 3 min 50 secs), there was an average of one
unique laughter instance every seven seconds for it to be intensely laughter-inducing.

Attending Russell Peters’ standup comedy show developed my intrigue in how
humor and laughter is produced in rhetoric. To practice humor in public speaking
and understand how laughter is induced in an audience, I joined my university’s
Toastmasters Club in 2010. The thesis to follow will mainly analyze humor,
rhetoric, and laughter in the public speaking context of Toastmasters speeches.
1.1 The Aim and Scope of the Study

This study provides an analysis of audience laughter in 57 Toastmasters' speeches from 2012 to 2017. Laughter in the public speaking context of Toastmasters is analyzed to make inferences on the theoretical constructs: Humor and Rhetoric. Seven interrogatives, in the form of When, Where, Who, Which, What, Whom, and Why, are asked to formulate a comprehensive understanding of how humor is rhetorical:

1. When is humor rhetorical?
2. Where is the rhetorical humor located?
3. Who produces (& who consumes) the rhetorical humor?
4. Which semiotic mode triggers the rhetorical humor?
5. What technique generates the rhetorical humor?
6. Whom is the rhetorical humor jabbing?
7. Why is humor rhetorical?

This aim of this study is to uncover how humor is used as rhetoric in public speaking. Broadly, rhetoric is the strategic means to communicate (Corbett, 1990); humor is the play with meanings; and rhetorical humor (or interchangeably: humor-rhetoric) in this study refers to the communication that results in laughter because of the play with meanings. More technically, rhetoric as conceptualized by Aristotle (trans. 2004) is operationalized as the use of logos (i.e. logical appeal), pathos (i.e. emotional appeal), ethos (i.e. character appeal); humor refers to the embodied perception of an appropriate incongruity, triggered by the play in semiotics by individuals in society; humor-rhetoric (or interchangeably: rhetorical humor) refers
to the effective use of logos, pathos, ethos that triggers in an audience *embodied* laughter from *semiotic* play. The terms of *embodied* refers to a mind-body connection (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991) and *semiotic* refers to the use of signs (e.g. language words, visual gestures, vocal variations) to make meaning.

Importantly, the analysis of laughter in this study is delimited to *embodied* laughter as an unforced, spontaneous response by individuals in an audience consuming a rhetorical monologue. The interpretations of laughter in this study do not extend to laughter in other contexts, such as laughter reaction from being tickled, laughter during interpersonal dialogues, and infants laughing to communicate. I seek to show that laughter sparked by humor in rhetoric arises because adults who laughed were triggered by the appeals of logic, emotion, and character being attractive in a persuasive manner.

“How is humor used as rhetoric in the winning Toastmasters' speeches?” is the overarching research question investigated. This study focuses on the mechanisms of humor and rhetoric. The scope of this research does not seek to substantially explore the functions of humor and rhetoric. The *causes* influencing how humor is rhetorical are examined thoroughly, but the *effects* of rhetorical humor are not scrutinized. The variables of Location, Producer-Consumer Relation, Semiotic Mode, Technique, Target, and Appeal are identified as *causes* influencing when the Embodied Cognition of humor is rhetorical. Examining the functional *effects* of humor and rhetoric, in the context of public speaking at a Toastmasters competition¹, is not the focus of this study.

¹ The Toastmasters competition analyzed refers to the World Championship of Public Speaking® (WCPS®), which is described in section 4.1.
1.2 Research on Laughter

“Constructs are theoretical creations based on observations, but which cannot be observed directly or indirectly” (Babbie, 1989, p. 109; Boyd, Gove & Hitt, 2005, p. 244). Laughter, on the other hand, is a measurable variable that can be observed and is directly recorded in this study to make inferences on the investigated constructs: rhetoric and humor. The literature on the theoretical constructions of Rhetoric and Humor is reviewed in Chapter 2. In this chapter here, I review the research on the main variable that is examined in this study: Laughter.

Prior to the 18th century, most scholars viewed laughter as a display of negative morality (Wickberg, 1998). Laughter was regarded as an aggressive act, which emanates from “perceiving an inferiority in another person” (Martin, 2007, p. 22). Laughing was generally considered impolite and crude by the societal norms of 18th century Europe. A distinction between laughing at someone (e.g. aggressive ridicule) and laughing with someone (e.g. friendly banter) was not made. However, from the 18th century onwards, when societies began to be more competent in language, wit (i.e. using words and ideas in a quick and inventive way, often as a teasing remark) evolved to be more widely adopted as a practice of communication. Progressively, “the intellectual aspects of laughter were elevated over the emotional” (Martin, 2007, p. 22). The ability to incite laughter by revealing novel surprises among seemingly incongruent ideas developed to be a desired “conversational art form” (Martin, 2007, p. 22). From the 19th century onwards, with the increase in theatre and plays involving dramatic comedy, laughter evolved to be regarded as an appreciation of entertainment that is welcomed. In the present 21st century of today, laughing in
public is widely more socially acceptable. To laugh is deemed as being light-hearted and health-enhancing for the psychology. Hospital clowns and laughter yoga are examples of practitioners promoting the “humor and health” movement (Martin, 2007, p. 25-26). Memes, GIFs, improvisational theatre, standup-acts, and satire news are some examples of the wide variety of comedic content being consumed and produced daily for humanity to laugh at, laugh with, and laugh away the social and political circumstances that we live in (Peck, 2014; Rea, 2008; Shifman, 2014). The connotation of laughter, within modern lenses, is no longer chiefly negative. Laughter has health benefits (e.g. Bennett & Lengacher, 2006; Fry, 1994; Mora-Ripoll, 2010), serves as a social lubricant (e.g. Glenn, 2003; Grammer & Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1990; Morreall, 2009a), and is subtly communicative (e.g. Buckely, 2005; Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000). Synthesizing the academic research on laughter of the last 50 years, three prevailing themes emerged: laughter as embodied; laughter as social; laughter as communicative.

1.2.1 Prevailing Themes

1.2.1.1 Laughter as Embodied

The term *embodied* in academia emphasizes that “cognition depends upon the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities”, and “that these individual sensorimotor capacities are themselves embedded in a more encompassing biological, psychological and cultural context” (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991, p. 172). Simply put, the physical body and the cognitive mind are not independent of one another. The research on *embodied* cognition emphasizes that to research the mind, we have to research the body (Alsmith & De
Laughter is an embodied experience in three main ways. First, the physical act of laughing is a universal capability latent in all individuals (Provine, 2001). Laughter is evidenced to be pre-linguistic and native in all humans (Apte, 1985; Falk, 2004; Scott, Lavan, Chen, & McGettigan, 2014). Infants laugh before they learn to speak (Lovorn, 2008; Provine 1996). The sounds of human laughter are also indistinguishable from one culture to another (Provine & Yong, 1991). The global, physical act of laughing is defined by “spontaneous sounds and movements of the face and body to express joy, mirth, amusement or sometimes derision” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018). From a physical science perspective, laughter is characterized vocally by a sonic structure of short, vowel-like syllable, which can be objectified by a sound spectrograph in terms of frequency and intensity (Provine, 1996, 2001). From a biological science perspective, laughter is validated to be a basic human reflex, functioning from the hindbrain, which is observed even among deaf-blind children (Askenasy, 1987; Makagon, Funayama & Owren, 2008; Ruch & Ekman, 2001). The instinctive and distinctive auditory expression of laughter with accompanying facial and bodily movements are documented to be observable across all human cultures (Gervais & Wilson, 2005; Lefcourt, 2001; Ruch, Hofmann & Platt, 2013).

Second, embodied laughter is therapeutic for physiological health. According to Fry (1994) and Butler (2014), we do not merely laugh with our lungs, chest muscles and diaphragm; we laugh with our entire physical being. The physical act of laughter is
health-enhancing, when it reduces stress cortisol, produces endorphins and promotes blood circulation in the cardiovascular system (Bennett & Lengacher, 2006; Miller & Fry, 2009; White & Winzelberg, 1992). Reverberating belly laughter be it spontaneous or self-induced both bring physiological effects of relaxed muscles, improved respiration, invigorated circulation, increased pain tolerance, and enhanced immunity defense (Fry, 1977; Mahony, Burroughs & Lippman, 2002; Martin, 2002, 2004; Mooney, 2000; Schmitt, 1990). It is asserted by some medical researchers that there is no physiologic difference between spontaneous laughter and self-induced laughter because the same neurotransmitters are released in the brain (Kataria, 2011; Mora-Ripoll, 2010). Self-induced laughter therapy, or laughter yoga when it is done in groups with eye contact and playfulness among participants, is recommended by physicians for people to feel joy or as a treatment intervention for anger-management (Kataria, 2011). Kassinove & Tafrate (2002) recommends self-induced laughter as a therapeutic technique to cope with anger because to laugh and to still be angry at the same time is difficult, when laughing and being angry involves different facial activation units to release different neurotransmitters and different hormones. The therapeutic benefits of laughter on physical well-being, with practically no adverse deterrents and contraindications to biological health, are emphasized by doctors and well-corroborated in the literature (see Martin, 2002; Mora-Ripoll, 2010; Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009).

Third, embodied laughter is a distinctive physical response to humor. There are other behavioral responses to humor, such as involuntary smiling, a reflexive occurrence of pupils dilating and spontaneous opening up / throwing back of body posture (Deckers & Hricik, 1984; Nijholt, 2002; Pease & Pease, 2004). However, singularly-
speaking, smiling, pupils dilating, and open body postures are also behavioral indicators of interest and may not necessarily uniquely indicate experiential humor, as much as spontaneous laughter does individually. There are also other instinctive physiologic responses to humor, such as dopamine release in the reward processing region of the medial ventral prefrontal cortex (see Goel & Dolan, 2001), production of discordant EEG alpha in the right hemisphere (see Svebak, 1982), and observed blood flow / brain activity in the cerebellum (see Iwase et al., 2002; Rodden et al., 2001). However, these neuro-hormonal responses cannot be readily captured without a corresponding PET, EEG or fMRI scanner attached to participants. Furthermore, in these laboratory studies cited, other confounding emotions such as happiness, surprise and exhilaration can contribute to the recorded physiologic responses, apart from the investigated variable of experiential humor. Laughter has been employed in previous research as a behavioral variable that is measured to operationalize humor (see Moalla, 2015; Scott, Lavan, Chen, & McGettigan, 2014; Soble, 2016; Woodbury-Fariña, & Antongiorgi, 2014). The spontaneous, instinctive response of laughter is often elicited by the experience of humor. In short, the physical act of laughing is embodied when it is (i) universal, (ii) therapeutic for physiological health, and (iii) responsive to humor.

1.2.1.2 Laughter as Social
The body-based act of laughing is intricately connected with the social context. First, laughter is socially-influenced. Provine and Fischer (1989), via chi-square analysis of one-week laughter logs from 28 undergraduate participants, surmise that subjects in their study were “30 times more likely to laugh” in social situations as compared to solitary settings (p. 303). At experimental settings, the finding that participants
laugh more when with others (such as strangers, confederates or friends) is well-replicated (Brown, Brown, & Ramos, 1981; Freedman & Perlick, 1979; Osborne & Chapman, 1977). At naturalistic settings, it is observed that the larger the audience, the more likely audience members laugh at a comedy performance (Prerost, 1977). Covert observations of group interactions at food courts and bars replicated the finding that the larger the group size (i.e. 5 and above), the higher the frequency of spontaneous laughter recorded (Mehu & Dunbar, 2008). Characteristically, laughter is influenced by the social presence of others.

Second, laughter signals play in a social context. According to Grammer and Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1990), laughter is a ritualized metacommunication to cue that “This is play.” (p. 211). Ethologists purport that laughter sounds in a group serve as a “call for playmates to join in their play and/or to signal playful intent” (Nelson, 2012, p. 41). Glenn and Knapp (1987) explicate through conversational analysis how laughter serves as a primary frame marker in adults’ conversations shifting into playfulness. Laughter operates to indicate play and a humorous frame during interactions (Glenn, 2003). Reciprocal laughter as a response indicates the willingness to treat what was said and done as social play (O’Donnell-Trujillo & Adam, 1983). Characteristically, the sound of laughter can signal playfulness at social settings.

Third, laughter has social purposes. For example, ‘laughing with’ people is indicative of interest in social relationships (Graham, 1995; Martin, 2007; McAdams, Jackson & Kirshnit, 1984). In the dynamics of romantic attraction, both genders laugh more in response to humor from an opposite gender if they are initially attracted to the person as a potential mate, as compared to no attraction (Li
et al., 2009). In the dynamics of working relationships, subordinates are observed to laugh more when their superiors made humorous remarks, as compared to when humorous remarks were made among themselves (Coser, 1960). In the dynamics of mother-infant social play, laughter by mothers are observed to be twice more frequent than laughter by their one-year-old infants, and mothers produce significantly more reciprocal laughter than infants (Nwokah, Hsu, Dobrowolska, & Fogel, 1994). To ‘laugh with’ people in dynamic relationships is purposeful to “show affiliation” (Glenn, 2003, p. 29). To ‘laugh at’ people through mockery is also socially purposeful (Billig, 2005; Powell, 1988). For example, ‘laughing at’ is indicative of a disapproval which can comprise a corrective aim (Bergson, 1911/1999; Davies, 1998; Kuipers, 2008; Hobbs, 2007; Ziv, 1988). In sexual jokes, characters that are lewd are mocked at with derogatory labels (such as a lecher and slut) to humiliate impetuous promiscuity. In slapstick jokes, socially inappropriate behaviors (such as farting and picking of noses) are targets of laughter to disapprove of unfitting social behaviors. In web-meme jokes, obvious linguistic errors (such as McDonalds misspelling “Hashbrown” as “Harshbrown”) are embellished with trolling images to ridicule negligence. To be laughed at hurts and is purposive to provoke change (Prell, 1988). Characteristically, laughter has social purposes, which comprise the expressing of interaction interest and the jabbing of transgression in the social context. In short, laughter signals social play that is socially influenced for social purposes.

1.2.1.3 Laughter as Communication

The body-based, social expression of laughter is resultantly communicative. Laughter is communicative of an emotional state. According to Martin (2007), the
spontaneous expression of laughter is often due to us feeling the emotion of mirth (i.e., an amalgam of amusement, surprise, joy). However, Poyatos (1993) argues that laughter is also produced when we feel the emotion of anxiety, contempt or embarrassment. Grammer (1990) claims that it is not necessary to see postural gestures and accompanying facial expressions to feel the emotion in laughter. Experimental support for this claim was provided when participants, just by hearing the recorded audio laughter sounds of professional actors, were able to decode accurately the differentiating emotional category underlying joy laughter, tickling laughter, taunting laughter, and schadenfreude\(^1\) laughter (Szameitat et. al., 2009). Ekman (1997) offers the explanation that different laughter types differ in their sound structure, such that a person’s emotional state can be conveyed just by the acoustics of laughter. Laughter is reasoned to occur in multiple, mutually exclusive conditions such as derisive laughter, anxiety laughter or amusement laughter (Giles & Oxford, 1970). In synthesis, laughter can communicate affective-pleasure (e.g. joy, amusement, schadenfreude), but laughter can also communicate affective-discomfort (e.g. embarrassment, nervousness, anxiety). Outwardly to the casual eye, laughter is communicative of emotion, arising from an affective state.

Laughter is also communicative of cognition. It is conjectured that laughter communicates the cognitive comprehension of a joke (Derks, Gillikin, Bartolome-Rull, & Bogart, 1997; Suls, 1972). According to the incongruity-resolution theory of humor, incongruity is the prerequisite of humor and laughter can only arise when the hearer cognitively resolves the incongruity presented in a joke (Ritchie, 1999, 2009; Schadenfreude means: Pleasure derived by someone from another person’s misfortune (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018)
Suls, 1983). If there is no cognitive resolution of the incongruity, there is no laughter, and the hearer will merely be puzzled (Suls, 1972, 1983). However, it has also been suggested that apart from cognitive incomprehension (i.e. when the hearer does not have the necessary background knowledge to appreciate), there are other reasons for not laughing at a joke (Consalvo, 1989; Montemurro, 2003; Schenkein, 1972). An absence of a laughter display can be reflective of cognitive disapproval (Halliwell, 1991; Ransohoff, 1975). Cognitive comprehension of a joke is insufficient for laughter if the hearer is offended by the joke. The hearer may not like the play frame, preferring a more serious outlook of the specific matter. The hearer may also soberly object to the intellective views inherent in the joke. To illustrate, in an episode of the Simpsons, Homer makes a toast, “To alcohol! The cause of, and solution to, all of life's problems” (Groening, 2004). According to Lynch (2010), to laugh at this joke requires both the cognitive recognition of the contradiction (i.e. alcohol being a problem and a solution) and the cognitive agreement of the ‘truth’ revealed by the joke (i.e. alcohol indeed causes and solves all of life’s problems).

People laugh more from jokes that are in congruence to their views (Flamson & Barrett, 2008; Owen, 2000). Based on laughter expression scorings via the Facial Action Coding System (FACS), participants laughed with higher intensity and longer duration when the content of gender and racist jokes matched their opinions of gender and ethnicity roles (Lynch, 2010). Beyond the laboratory setting, Hay (2001) analyzed laughter from jokes in natural conversation data and reports “four implicatures” associated with laughter: “recognition of a humorous frame, understanding the humor, appreciating the humor, and agreeing with any message associated with it” (p. 55; original emphasis). Basically, laughter from cognition communicates understanding (i.e. cognitive comprehension) and
appreciation (e.g. cognitive agreement) of the joke presented. A joke typically involves incongruent ideas being suddenly connected for comic effect. According to Oring (1992, 2003, 2016), to understand and to appreciate a joke requires the perception of an appropriate incongruity. Laughing out loud from jokes is communicative of cognition, reflecting understanding and appreciation of an appropriate incongruity. Or, at the very least, comprehending the joke is required for a mind-body connection act of laughing from jokes.

Laughter is also communicative of mockery. Plato viewed laughter as malicious when people ridiculed the weak (Wickberg, 1998). According to Plato (in the *Philebus* as reprinted in Morrreall, 1987), we laugh at what is ridiculous in other people, feeling delight instead of pain when we see even friends in misfortune. Koestler (1964) evaluated the 29 references to laughter in the Old Testament of the Bible and construe that the deed of laughing is mostly linked to ridicule, contempt, derision, scorn, or mockery. In addition, Bain (1859) is often cited for his quote that characterizes laughter as the strong pleasure one emotes by degrading a person or an idea of interest: “The occasion of the ludicrous is the degradation of some person or interest possessing dignity, in circumstances that excite no other strong emotion” (p. 248). This stance that laughter represents mockery, degradation, scorn is not only evident in classical works. In contemporary research, Davies (1990, 1998, 2002, 2011a) rigorously analyzed jokes from around the world, such as Poland, Australia, India, Hong Kong, Britain, and is well-known to have had characterized jokes as the “play with aggression”. According to Davies (1988), “the most outstanding feature of the jokes told in industrial societies is the enormous and universal popularity of jokes told at the expense of allegedly stupid groups of people” (p. 1). For example,
the corpus of pre-internet jokes under the communist Soviet Union, which propagated via telling and re-telling, “predominately ridiculed the rulers and the political system” (Davies, 2007, p. 291). Additionally, Billig (2005) critiques the superiority, incongruity, relief theories of laughter, synthesizes them in their historical context during which the theories were formulated, and argues that ridicule is evident in all jokes. Billig (2001) analyzed jokes from Ku Klux Klan websites and highlights the example of “What do you call three blacks at the bottom of a river? - A good start” to emphasize that even if the target was changed to ‘three lawyers’, there is still aggressive ridicule latent in jokes, beyond a racist component. Notably, Haugh (2010, 2014, 2017) formulates the term ‘jocular mockery’, which is specified by him as the way in which “mocking/ridiculing can be accomplished within a jocular or non-serious frame”. Based on analyzing an extensive corpus of conversations amongst Anglo-Australian speakers of English, Haugh (2014) argues that “jocular mockery constitutes a recognizable and recurrent practice in everyday interactions” (p. 76). Essentially, jokes require mockery for laughter. Ridicule and aggression provoking laughter is a recurring motif in the scholarly literature since Plato (Martin & Ford, 2018). According to Gruner (2017), laughter mocks at “people, groups, and concepts” (p. 75-106). Gruner (2017) gives a series of little moron joke examples to illustrate such as: “Did you hear about the little moron who stayed up all night studying for a blood test? Did you hear about the little moron who took a ruler to bed so he could tell how long he had slept?” (p. 75). Apart from the reoccurring character of the little moron, the concept of a blood test and the idea of sleep-measurement are ridiculed. Characteristically, laughter is communicative of mockery (or ridicule or aggression), jabbing at people, groups, concepts.
1.2.2 Defining and Specifying the Behavior of Laughter

Broadly, the communication of laughter is embodied and social. The physical act of laughing is embodied when it is universal, therapeutic for physiological health, and responsive to humor. Laughter signals social play that is socially influenced for social purposes. Laughter communicates emotion (arising from an affective state), cognition (reflecting comprehension of an appropriate incongruity), and mockery (jabbing at people, groups, or concepts). Specifically, in this study, the embodiment of laughter by individuals, at a social setting, is regarded to be communicative of emotion, cognition, and mockery.

According to Billig (2018), laughter being communicative of ridicule, or mockery, is not intuitive and not perceptibly known to the general population given the superficially optimistic (or naively positive) regard towards laughter in the current sociocultural landscape. Billig (2005, 2018) explains that this is in part due to business marketers selling only the bright side of laughing. The dark side latent in laughter is either consciously or unconsciously ignored by individuals. Both scholars and non-scholars alike portray laughter with other means of interpretation. For example, people regard that their laughter does not mock, but teases people and their beliefs. This is in part due to people inherently wanting to see themselves as good-natured human beings, so they prefer not to ascribe a derogatory label on their actions. It is more comforting to describe (especially) one’s own laughter as primarily good-natured with affiliative purposes, in which any negative side-effects are inadvertent. However, some scholars point to laughter as being primarily cruel before positive by-products can be accompanied (e.g. Billig, 2005, Gruner, 2017, Rappoport, 2005). Foundationally, is laughter more reflective of affiliative good-
natedness or aggressive cruelty? Why does an audience laugh during a Toastmaster’s speech? Can laughter be deconstructed in terms of cognitive appeal, affective appeal, and character appeal? These questions will be tackled.

1.3 Organization of Thesis

This thesis is organized into seven Chapters. In Chapter 1, the key terms, aim and scope of the study were specified before research pertaining to the behavioral variable of laughter was synthesized. Embodied laughter at a social setting is communicative of emotion, cognition, and mockery. In Chapter 2, the theoretical constructs of rhetoric and humor are reviewed and examined. Three gaps in the existing literature are identified before the overarching research inquiry is stated: How is humor used as rhetoric? In Chapter 3, the methodological design of the thesis is assembled when seven mechanisms identified to pertinently influence how humor is rhetorical are synthesized for interrogation. The seven variables of (i) Embodied Cognition [when], (ii) Location [where], (iii) Producer-Consumer Relation [who], (iv) Semiotic Mode [which], (v) Technique [what], (vi) Target [whom], and (vii) Appeal [why] are pinpointed as factors coinciding with rhetorical humor, as a whole. The interrogative methodology put forth is then promptly applied to an example to illustrate how the analytical framework operates for one toast speech before it is adapted on a larger scale to a corpus of toast speeches. In Chapter 4, the corpus of 57 winning Toastmasters’ speeches is described and the analytical process is outlined. Laughter is operationalized to be differentiated in terms of laughter instances (i.e. spontaneous audience laughter that is audible) and laughter moments (i.e. spontaneous audience laughter that is audible for at least 2000ms).
In Chapter 5, the results and interpretations to comprehensively analyze how humor is used as rhetoric in 57 Toastmasters’ speeches are accounted for. In Chapter 6, the findings of the study are discussed in relation to the existing literature. In Chapter 7, the results, interpretations and discussion of the findings in Chapters 5 and 6 are synopsized in section 7.1. Limitations, significance, and future research directions are further discussed in sections 7.2, 7.3 and 7.4 respectively, before the thesis is formally concluded in section 7.5 when the aim of the study is revisited and reviewed.

Of note, the organization of the thesis includes a prologue and an epilogue in the very beginning and at the end respectively. The transcript of Russell Peters’ humor in rhetoric mentioned in the prologue will be briefly referred to in Chapters 3, 6 and 7. Additionally, because the 57 public-speaking performances analyzed are dynamic and three-dimensional acts of rhetoric packed with visual action (e.g. hand gestures, facial expressions, physical movement in space) and audio nuance (e.g. tonality, pauses, volume, pitch, accent), static and two-dimensional transcription of words alone can never capture the rich spatial-temporal details and audio-visual nuance. Full video links to the 57 speeches and their transcriptions are provided in Appendix B and Supplementary Material 2 respectively to be referred. However, viewing this thesis as an online document (i.e. http://bit.ly/ntuphd-docx or simply bit.ly/ntuphd-pdf) is strongly recommended for ease of access to the video evidence.

The objective of this thesis is to investigate how ‘humor’ is used as ‘rhetoric’ in public speaking, via the behavioral variable of ‘laughter’. In this thesis, the top three key words are ‘laughter’, ‘humor,’ and ‘rhetoric’, which is why these three words
feature prominently in the first three chapters and are prioritized. The fourth most important word in this thesis is ‘Toastmasters’ and the detailing of it is featured in Chapter 4. Background information regarding Toastmasters International (TI®) and the World Championship of Public Speaking® (WCPS)® are specifically described in section 4.1. Although TI® is a substantially massive public-speaking organization operating across 143 countries, not all readers already know of TI® and so referring ahead to section 4.1 may be helpful.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 reviews the theoretical constructions of rhetoric and humor. In sections 2.1 and 2.2, the main theories and approaches to study rhetoric and humor are surveyed and outlined, before the two constructs of inquiry are broadly and specifically defined for the purposes of this Toastmasters study. Empirical research that analyzes both the constructs of rhetoric and humor are reviewed in section 2.3. Three literature gaps, which this study endeavors to address, are subsequently identified in section 2.4.

2.1 The Theoretical Construct of Rhetoric

The construct of rhetoric, often characterized as “the art of selecting the most effective means of persuasion”, has a long and distinguished history (Sandler, Epps & Waicukauski, 2010, p. 16). The oldest known parchment on “how to speak effectively was inscribed about 3000 BCE” by Pharaoh Huni (McCroskey, 1986, p. 261). The oldest known extant book on how to persuade effectively - “the Precepts - was composed about 2675 BCE” by the Egyptian Vizier Ptah-Hotep (McCroskey, 1986, p. 262). These early Egyptian works gave minimal contributions to rhetoric theory because most rhetoric scholars were unaware of them. However, these archaic Egyptian texts are significant in indicating at least 5000 years of scholarly interest in rhetoric.

Classical Greece (510 BCE to 323 BCE) was when serious analysis of oratory persuasion first developed. Isocrates (436-338 BCE) established the first academy of
rhetoric to teach rhetorical composition as a practical skill for human betterment (Wagner, 1922). Plato (427-347 BCE) formulated theorems of speech construction in the Phaedrus to define rhetoric as "the art of winning the soul by discourse" (Freeley, 1960). Subsequently, Plato’s student Aristotle (384-322 BCE) refined Plato’s theorems in the seminal work, Rhetoric, that to this day still underpins rhetoric theories (Anderson & Middleton, 2014; Bizzell & Herzberg, 2000).

Aristotle’s Rhetoric, which has three volumes, is the most influential and generative work on persuasion (Golden, Berquist & Coleman, 1997; Gross & Walzer, 2000), stimulating scholars throughout history to research on rhetoric in varying contexts. Rhetoric was studied during the Roman Empire (by Cicero, Quintilian and Longinus), the Medieval period (by Augustine, Capella and Boethius), the Renaissance (by Valla, Erasmus and Ramus), the Industrial Revolution (by Campbell, Priestley and Whately) and in the Contemporary Era (by Burke, Weaver and Perelman). To cover all perspectives and variations of rhetoric that notable scholars have discussed is beyond the scope of this thesis. As such, I will discuss only the three most prevalent and significant theories of rhetoric, which I will relate to the context of Toastmasters, before specifying a working definition of rhetoric for this study.

2.1.1 Prevailing Theories

Among the many theories of rhetoric, two theories have been timeless in their pertinence - the Three Rhetorical Appeals and the Five Canons of Rhetoric (Hauser, 2002; Schiappa, 1999; Toye, 2013). Both theories have their roots in Aristotle’s Rhetoric. The third prevailing theory of rhetoric to be outlined is a prevalent
contemporary rhetorical theory: Rhetorical Dramatism, as conceptualized by Kenneth Burke (Burke, 1945, 1966, 1972; Bygrave, 2012; Simons, 2004).

2.1.1.1 The Three Rhetorical Appeals

From Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (Bk. 1:2), there are three artistic proofs that an orator must utilize to persuade any audience: **logos** (the logical appeal of the speech), **pathos** (the emotional appeal of the speech), and **ethos** (the character appeal of the speaker).

On the other hand, inartistic proofs are sources external to the orator, such as pre-existing facts, judicial laws, and physical evidence. An orator curates and invents artistic proofs from the static data of inartistic proofs to compose arguments that are persuasive, interesting and useful to the audience. According to Golden, Berquist and Coleman (1997), what defines an effective rhetoric is the adroit application of the three artistic proofs: logos, pathos, ethos.

**Logos** is the employment of logical reasoning through sound, rational arguments to demonstrate a truth or an apparent truth. “Truth is not guaranteed by logos, only plausibility” (Sloane, 2001, p. 459). Logos does not convey what is certainly true, but only what is made to seem true to a given audience. **Pathos** is the application of emotions to affect the judgment of the audiences. In applying pathos, the orator should have three foci: (i) the frame of mind of the audience, (ii) the variation of emotions in and among people, and (iii) the influence the speaker has on the emotions of the audience (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2000). Pathos does not require addressing all emotions, but “only those that bear upon relevance in the public argumentation” (Sloane, 2001, p. 557). **Ethos** is the appeal of what the orator says in the speech to reflect the “speaker’s character or personal credibility” (Herrick, 2001,
The ways to establish ethos includes: “practical wisdom [phronēsis], virtue [aretē] and goodwill [eunoia]” (Sloane, 2001, p. 266). All three factors of logos, pathos, ethos have to be accounted for if this tri-factor theoretical framework of rhetoric is applied.

Conceived almost 2500 years ago, the theory of the three rhetorical appeals has withstood the test of time. Although the explications of logos, pathos, ethos have been debated, the parsimonious threefold structure and guiding principles of logic, emotion and character remain (Simons & Jones, 2011). It is a recurrent motif in oratory research that the effectiveness of any speech hinges decisively on logical argumentation, emotions evoked and the appeal of character.

2.1.1.2 The Five Canons of Rhetoric

Another theoretical framework that has been revered across two millennia is the division of rhetoric into Five Canons: Invention (Inventio), Arrangement (Dispositio), Style (Elocutio), Memory (Memoria), and Delivery (Pronuntiatio). Although Aristotle had substantial writings in Inventio, Dispositio and Elocutio, Cicero (107-43 BCE) is commonly credited as the rhetorician who brought together and organized the Five Canons (Herrick, 2001, p. 96-97). Quintilian (35-100 CE) thereafter produced Institutio Oratoria which comprises 12 comprehensive books on training the oratorical process. Theoretical and practical issues of the Five Canons were specified by Quintilian and the Five Canons have been the backbone of rhetorical education ever since (McCroskey, 1986).
According to Cicero’s *De Inventione*, as translated by Hubbell (1949): **Invention** is the discovery of valid, or seemingly valid, arguments to render one’s cause plausible. This includes finding resources and knowledge to substantiate the claims to be made. **Arrangement** is the distribution of arguments thus discovered in the proper order. This includes selecting and apportioning the organization of the materials to be presented. **Style** (or expression) is the fitting of the proper language to the invented matter. This includes being eloquent and appropriate in word-choices for the pertaining discourse. **Memory** is the firm mental grasp of matter and words. This includes remembering, reproducing and retaining through mnemonics. **Delivery** is the control of voice and body in a manner suitable to the dignity of the subject matter and the style. This includes performing on the nonverbal aspects such as tonal modulations and physical expressiveness.

The Five Canons is a “systematic, chronological sequence” that covers the entirety of the oratorical process (Murphy, Katula & Hoppmann, 2014, p. 131). The speaker has to first find (“**invent**”) ideas, then “**arrange**” them in an order, before putting worded “**style**” to the ideas. The speaker has to remember (“**memorize**”) the ideas, their order, and their words, before performing (“**deliver**”) the ordered and worded ideas to an audience through voice and gestures. The Five Canons of Rhetoric is an enduring framework in oratory research because all five components are necessary to be effective in public speaking (Crick, 2014).

2.1.1.3 Rhetorical Dramatism

Among contemporary rhetoric theories, I. A. Richards and Kenneth Burke are the two scholars frequently credited for spearheading the new rhetoric movement
(Corbett & Connors, 1999). In contrast to old rhetoric, which focuses primarily on persuasion, Richards focused on communication to view rhetoric as “how language in any kind of discourse works to produce understanding in an audience” (McCroskey, 1986, p. 272). Burke also departed from the emphasis on persuasion to view rhetoric as identification and drama (Burke, 1951).

To Burke, rhetoric is dramatism that involves three components: identification, the **dramatic pentad**, and **guilt-redemption** (Brock, 1985). Identification is “the common ground that exists between speaker and audience” (Griffin, Ledbetter & Sparks, 2015, p. 298). Burke viewed rhetoric as the study of various modes of achieving this identification with the audience (Corbett & Connors, 1999). Unlike the term “persuasion” which stresses upon “deliberative design”, the term identification allows the inclusion of partially unconscious factors, such as repressed emotion, in its appeal (Burke 1951, p. 203). The **dramatic pentad** is a critic’s tool to uncover the motives of any speaker through five elements of the human drama: act, agent, agency, scene and purpose (Griffin, Ledbetter & Sparks, 2015). Burke viewed communication as generating symbols not just to transmit messages, but as an action of rhetoric (Burke, 1966). Anything freely said for a purpose is a rhetorical act, such as when an actor chooses to perform a dramatic action for a motive (Bygrave, 2012). **Guilt-redemption** is the perspective that purging guilt is the “ultimate motive for all public rhetoric”, “even if the rhetoric is unaware of its force” (Griffin, Ledbetter & Sparks, 2015, p. 297). Burke viewed purging guilt (i.e. all noxious feelings) as the plot of all human drama, or the root of all rhetoric (Bobbitt, 2007). Public speaking serves to purge, through mortification or
victimization, the guilt we feel because of our place in the social order so as to ideally achieve the new order of transcendence (Burke, 1961).

The overarching frame of Burke’s rhetorical theory is that life is drama. Dramatic human symbolic behaviors are rhetorical. Dramatism is an appropriate strategy for viewing rhetoric, as well as life (Mangham & Overington, 2005). Burke’s work on the linguistic resources of identification and the actional processes of symbols had notably “shifted the locus of rhetorical influence from arguments to symbols as the means of evoking shared meaning” (Sloane, 2001, p. 504). Appropriately, in the Encyclopedia of Rhetoric, Sloane (2001, p. 503) hails Burke’s interdisciplinary dramatistic perspective as “the single most important influence on the development of modern rhetoric”.

2.1.2 Defining and Specifying the Construct of Rhetoric

In modern rhetoric research, it is generally accepted that the definition of rhetoric has extended beyond an exclusive examination of persuasion (Foss & Griffin, 1995; Hauser, 2002; King, 2010). Communication to inform and motivate is now also included as functions of rhetoric (Perelman, 1979; Marsh, 2001; Rowan, 1994). The definition of rhetoric as “the art or the discipline that deals with the use of discourse, either spoken or written, to inform or persuade or motivate an audience, whether that audience is made up of one person or a group of persons” (Corbett, 1990, p. 3; Corbett & Connors, 1999, p. 1) is often employed and cited (e.g. Berger, L., 2010; Davies, R., 1998; Lamb; 1998; Olali, 2014; Marsh, 2001, 2012).
Broadly, the theoretical construct of rhetoric is defined in the literature as the strategic means to inform, persuade or motivate specific audiences. Or more plainly: Rhetoric is the strategic means to communicate. What then specifically is the strategic means will depend on the theoretical framework employed which gives a set of terms or concepts for inquiry. For example, a framework employing the Five Canons will investigate the means of *invention, arrangement, style, memory* and *delivery* on informing, persuading and motivating specific audiences. On the other hand, a framework employing the dramatistic pentad will investigate the means of *act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose* on informing, persuading and motivating specific audiences.

When applying these three prevailing theories of rhetoric to the context of Toastmasters\(^1\), the concepts provided by each theory are all explanatory in accounting for the facets of Toastmasters speeches. A Toastmaster has to find ideas, organize the knowledge, insert personal flair to the content and retain awareness of the components before performing the speech. Identification with the audience, through a dramatic act, can allow a Toastmaster to purge one’s noxious feelings for redemption/ transcendence. The effectiveness of a Toastmasters speech also hinges on the appeal of logic, emotion, and character.

Each leading theory has its own merits. However, as much as the *Five Canons of Rhetoric* is a framework most effective for training orators, this framework is less effective for analyzing already orated speeches. For example, to analyze the speaker’s memory of ideas is not the most pertinent influence that contributes to the

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\(^1\) Background information of public speaking at a Toastmasters setting is described in section 4.1.
informing, persuading and motivating of the Toastmasters audience. Furthermore, as much as the Rhetorical Dramatism is comprehensive in providing unique dramatic analysis for each speech, it is also a less elegant model for speech analysis relative to the Three Rhetorical Appeals. Putting aside the components of identification and guilt-redemption (which are internal psychological processes), the dramatic pentad has five elements that must be explicated in the analysis of each symbolic rhetorical action. For each additional element analyzed under a theoretical framework, there is an added explanatory variance but also an added error variance. Although the framework of identification + dramatistic pentad + guilt-redemption in Rhetorical Dramatism gives more depth and details to speech analyses for more explanatory variance, there will also be added error variances.

I assessed that the Three Rhetorical Appeals is the most pertinent theoretical framework to analyze the rhetoric in Toastmasters’ speeches for this study. The use of logos, pathos, ethos is the essence of what is required to inform, persuade, and motivate the specified audience. The tripartite appeals of logic, emotion, and character may also relate well to the analysis of laughter moments. Therefore, to specify an operational definition: Rhetoric is defined in this study as the use of logos, pathos, ethos to communicate to a Toastmasters-Audience.

2.2 The Theoretical Construct of Humor

Similar to rhetoric, the theoretical construct of humor has a long and distinguished history. Amy Carrell’s (2008, p. 303-332) book chapter on the Historical Views of Humor includes an archival account of how eminent philosophers such as Aristotle, Cicero, Hobbes (1588-1679), Kant (1724-1804) and Schopenhauer (1788-1860)
regarded the concept of humor. However, unlike rhetoric whereby the core ideas stand in place due to the voluminous writings of early rhetoricians, the word ‘humor’ has a convoluted history that has shifted in connotations over the centuries.

Martin (2007, p. 20-26) streamlines how the conceptual construct of humor has evolved across time. The etymology of ‘humor’ began as a Latin word, *humorem*, meaning fluids that flow in our bodies. Hippocrates (460-370 BCE) postulated that good health depends on the balance of the four main humors: black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, and blood. Before the 16th century, humor mostly “referred to a physical substance but gradually developed psychological connotations relating to both enduring temperament and temporary mood” (p. 21). A person was regarded to be temperamental because his or her *humorem* (i.e. body fluids) is unbalanced. In the 16th century, “the idea of humor as an unbalanced temperament or personality trait led to its use to refer to any behavior that deviates from social norms, thus humor came to mean an odd, eccentric or peculiar person” (p. 21). Based on the playwright writings of Ben Jonson (1598/2001) and Corbyn Morris (1744), being “a man of humor” has negative connotations in society because it meant taking pleasure in imitating odd, eccentric or peculiar people. In the 18th century, humor was largely regarded to be synonymous with ridicule which meant active, aggressive attacks to “outwit and humiliate people by making them laughable to others” (p. 22). However, in the 19th century, due to the efforts by British social reformers championing humanitarian values, ‘humour’ was differentiated as a word to characterize benevolence for affiliative functions in laughter, in contrast to aggressive-base ridicule. Over the course of the 20th century, the distinction between ‘humour’ and ‘ridicule’ was blurred. The concept of ‘humor’ came to largely mean the capacity to
use wit for benign playfulness and less so for aggressive intent. To not have a sense of humor gradually evolve to be regarded as an undesirable personality trait because it implies that a person is mentally rigid and excessively serious.

“Today, the word humor is an umbrella term with a generally positive, socially desirable connotation, which refers to anything people say or do that is perceived to be funny and evokes mirth and laughter in others” (Martin, 2007, p. 20; original emphasis). Since this study analyzes a present-day dataset in a contemporary setting, the theoretical construct of humor has to be investigated through the lenses of modern connotations. Adhering to Martin’s (ibid.) synthesis, humor is regarded to be socially desirable because mirth and laughter is experienced when what is said or done is perceived to be funny. Before a working definition to examine the humor in Toastmasters speeches is specified, academic approaches to study humor that is prevailing in the contemporary scholarship are acknowledged and outlined.

### 2.2.1 Prevailing Approaches

In humor research today, the International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS), officially established in 1989, is the leading scholarly organization. The HUMOR journal, managed by ISHS, has four issues of publications each year. To date, HUMOR has published over 600 peer-reviewed papers from varied fields of study. Although humor research today draws upon multiple disciplines, theoretical approaches to study humor from the academic disciplines of Psychology, Linguistics/ Literature, and Sociology dominate at the present time (Raskin, 2008, p. 3-4).
2.2.1.1 Psychological Approaches to Humor

According to Victor Raskin, who is the first Editor-in-Chief (1987-1999) and the first Editor-at-Large (1999-present) of HUMOR, “In the current scientific/scholarly/academic rigorous study of humor, psychology has the longest history” (Raskin, 2008, p. 3). The psychology of humor does not study the humor of humorous material only, but rather emphasizes the study of humor in relation to people’s behavior (Ruch, 2008). People’s behavior refers to what can be “objectively assessed”, as well as the “subjective experiences” of internal processes (Ruch, 2008, p. 17). The central tenet from the Psychology discipline is that humor is chiefly psychological when it is an individual’s experience.

An individual’s psychology is emphasized as the primary influence of humor from this perspective. The individual serves as the main unit of analysis. Via objective recording and/or subjective assessment of an individual’s behavior, psychologists thereafter make inferences about the humor of individuals as an aggregate after multiple data from individuals are collected. This philosophy towards knowledge construction has resulted in a significant quantity of psychological-based humor research. Examining how individuals appreciate humor individually is a prominent theme of research undertaken by humor psychologists. To elaborate, there are over 60 psychometric tools to diagnose humor states and traits, with over 20 measures investigating the ‘sense of humor’ alone (Ruch, 1998, p. 405-412; Martin & Sullivan, 2013). Out of all these tests and assessments, the conceptualization that individuals engage in four distinctive humor styles (affiliative, aggressive, self-enhancing, self-defeating) stands out for its scholarly impact. The *Humor Styles Questionnaire* (HSQ; Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray & Weir, 2003) which
psychometrically assesses **affiliative humor style**, **aggressive humor style**, **self-enhancing humor style**, and **self-defeating humor style**, based on the self-report answers to 32 questions on a 7-point Likert Scale, is currently the most cited measure of humor, with over 1500 citations as at December 2018.

According to Schermer, Martin, Martin, Lynskey and Vernon (2013), the HSQ is well-validated and has been translated into numerous languages, such as Arabic (Taher, Kazarian & Martin, 2008), Chinese (Chen & Martin, 2007), French (Saroglou, Lacour & Demeure, 2010), German (Leist & Müller, 2013) and Turkish (Çeçen, 2007). According to Martin (2007, p. 210-214), the four humor styles are stable personality traits demonstrated to be fairly consistent in and among all individuals. However, recent research is growingly criticizing the *unnecessary distinction* between **self-enhancing humor style** and **self-defeating humor style** because to self-psychometrically categorize and determine whether self-directed humor actually elevate or deprecate the self is deeply problematic (see Heintz, 2017a; Heintz, 2017b; Heintz & Ruch, 2015; Heintz & Rush, 2018, and Ruch & Heintz, 2017 for the empirical critiques). In the paradigm of reductionism science that relies profoundly on Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), one indispensable tenet is that every factor added into an explanatory model should bring (i) unique explanatory variance to (ii) maximize total explanatory power (iii) while not incurring imprudent error variance at the same time (Ferguson, 1954; Marascuilo & Levin, 1983; Nolan, 1997). Therefore, a *three-factor* explanatory model (i.e.

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1 refers to the tendency of creating humor to amuse others and to facilitate relationships
2 refers to the tendency of using humor to put down, disparage, or criticize others
3 refers to self-directed humor to elevate the self in a benevolently positive manner
4 refers to self-disparaging humor to diminish the self in a potentially detrimental manner
aggressive-based humor, affiliative-based humor, and self-directed humor), rather
than a four-factor explanatory model to psychometrically assess the styles of
personal humor, is more parsimoniously incisive (Heintz, 2017c). Nevertheless,
partly because the critiques do not counter-propose with a well-validated and
popularized psychometric measure of personal humor styles (yet), to regard personal
humor styles in terms of the prototype four factors is still widely more adopted in
current research (e.g. Meyer et. al., 2017; Schermer, et. al, 2017; Yonatan-Leus,
Tishby, Shefler & Wiseman, 2018).

Other prominent research themes of how individuals psychologically experience
humor are the time-honored relief theory and superiority theory of humor. The relief
theory of humor posits that individuals seek “humor to release tension” (e.g. Freud,
1905, p. 282; Gregory, 1924, p. 40). Individuals laugh to reduce internal stress (Fry,
1963), to ease anxiety (Schaeffer, 1981), or to dissipate suppressed desires within
ourselves (Freud, 1905). The superiority theory of humor, on the other hand, posits
that humor chiefly arises when individuals “feel superiority over others” (e.g. Bain,
1859, p. 153; Plato, 1975, p. 45-49). Mirth is psychologically experienced, inwardly
or outwardly, when individuals enjoy some sort of amused triumph over others due
to their foolishness (Gruner, 2017), misfortunes (Singer, 1968), or ignorance
(Berger, 1987). Both relief and superiority explanations of humor are classified as
early essential theories (Martin, 2007, p. 31-56). Humor academics today generally
do not disagree that the psychological underpinnings of humor include the
motivation for emotional superiority and relief.

2.2.1.2 Linguistic Approaches to Humor
The linguistics of humor, including literary humor, is the next most important in terms of major contributions to modern humor research (Raskin, 2008). The central tenet from the linguistic and literary disciplines is that language pivotally impacts how humor is used. Language in this case generally refers to *semiotics*, which includes both linguistic and non-linguistic signs and symbols for meaning-making. According to van Lier (2004), *semiotics* encompasses semantics (relation between signs and the denoted meaning), syntactics (relation among or between signs in formal structures) and pragmatics (relation between signs and sign-using agents or interpreters). The primary methodological approach from the Linguistics and Literature discipline is the “discourse analysis of humor”, “characterized by a focus on actual, naturalistic data”, such as transcriptions of recordings and literary documents (Attardo, 2008, p. 116). For example, Norrick (2003) has analyzed the pragmatics of conversational humor in narrative jokes, wordplay, and anecdotes; varied examples of conversational jokes were examined to address the structure, forms, and interpersonal functions of humorous discourse.

Language is emphasized as the primary influence of humor from this academic approach. The *Semantic Script-based Theory of Humor* (SSTH; Raskin, 1979, 1981, 1985) is a prominent foundation in modern linguistic theories to analyze humor. The SSTH examines semantic roles and script oppositions in the application of semantic script theory to humor (Raskin, 1986). The *General Theory of Verbal Humor* (GTVH; Attardo & Raskin, 1991) is thereafter put forth to expand the range of descriptive and explanatory dimensions covered by the SSTH. In addition to Script-Oppositions (SO), Target (TA), Language (LA), Logical Mechanism (LM), Narrative Strategy (NS) and Situation (SI) are added as elements of analysis, such
that the GTVH can account for all humor in verbal texts (Attardo, 1994). Although
the theoretical framework of the GTVH has been accurately criticized, such as the
parameter of Logical Mechanism (LM) being too loosely defined to serve as an
element in a scientific theory (Davies, 2004, 2011b) and the determinant of Script-
Oppositions (SO) not being fundamentally crucial for humor (Oring, 2011, 2016),
the GTVH stands out for its academic impact. There have been multiple applications
of the GTVH to various contexts, such as experimental studies on university
students (Samson & Hempelmann, 2011; Summerfelt, Lippman, & Hyman, 2010;
Vallade, Booth-Butterfield, & Vela, 2013), twitter/social media blogs analysis
(Holton & Lewis, 2011; Whalen, Pexman, Gill & Nowson, 2013), advertisements
(Damiano, 2014; Weinberger & Gulas, 1992) and conversational humor (Archakis
& Tsakona, 2005; Bertrand & Priego-Valverde, 2011; Kotthoff, 2006a; Lampert &
Ervin-Tripp, 2006). For example, Archakis & Tsakona (2005) analyzed 120 minutes
of conversation among 6 Greek male friends who were between 18 to 20 years old.
Based on semantic Script-Oppositions (SO), 46 humorous instances of
conversational humor were identified. The authors categorized the Target (TA) of
humor in every humorous instance but did not account for the Language (LA),
Narrative Strategy (NS), Situation (SI) and Logical Mechanism (LM) for every jab
line in their conversational data as it was not the focus of their study. Their results
indicate that conversational humor mostly Targeted *people* in the out-group (n = 32),
and not *people* in the in-group (n = 2). The authors argue that interlocutors select
Targets outside their group to criticize the behavior of others but select Targets
inside their group to covertly correct in-group behavior. According to Archakis &
Tsakona (ibid.), “In both cases, the Target of humor reinforces the already existing
bonds among group members” and their study illustrates that “the Target of humor is
an important heuristic tool for describing its social function, revealing how it is exploited by conversationalists to project their shared beliefs and values” (p. 41).

Presently, Raskin is pushing for the linguistic analysis of humor to move in a computational direction based on an updated definition of script-oppositions (Raskin, 2015a, 2015b, 2009). Advancements in Ontological Semantic Technology (OST) have resulted in Natural Language Processing applications possessing the computational capacity to identify humor through logical reasoning (Lee & Kwon, 2014; Raskin, 2009; McShane, Nirenburg & Beale, 2015). Through engineering text interpretations into computed systems, the Ontological Semantic Theory of Humor (OSTH; Raskin, 2009) is proposed as the “next-level formalization” toward a “firm semantic basis” of humor (Taylor, 2014, p. 456 - 457). When the OST technology is practically operational to detect and produce humor, the OSTH may reasonably be the next postmodern theory that epitomizes contemporary humor research through a computational language approach that is formulated through big data.

2.2.1.3 Sociological Approaches to Humor

According to Raskin (2008), the discipline of sociology is third in its influence on contemporary humor research. Giselinde Kuipers, the Editor-in-Chief (2012-2016) and the Editor-at-Large (2017-present) of HUMOR, outlined five theoretical approaches that sociologists commonly employ to research humor (Kuipers, 2008). First, the functionalist approach interprets humor in terms of the “social functions it fulfills for a society or social group” (p. 364). Second, the conflict approach views humor as an “expression or reflection of social conflict” (p. 368). Third, the symbolic interactionist approach focuses on the role of humor in constructing
“meaning” and “social relations” (p. 373). Fourth, the phenomenological approach conceptualizes humor as a specific “outlook”, “worldview”, “mode” of perceiving and constructing the social world (p. 376). Fifth, the historical-comparative approach attempts to understand the “social role of humor through comparisons in time and space” (p. 378). The central tenet among the five sociological approaches to study humor is that forces in society pivotally impact humor.

Societal forces, ranging from the influences of a close-knit community to national perceptions of proper behavior, are emphasized as the primary influence of humor from a sociological perspective. According to Kuipers (2008), there is no sociological theory of humor, but sociology’s eclecticism provides the fluidity for vital contributions. A sociological framework of analysis has advanced humor research in varying facets, such as in ethnic humor jokes (Davies, 1990, 1998, 2002), the comic conception in societies (Davis, 1993), political humor (Benton, 1988; Speier, 1998; Lewis, 1997a, 1997b, 2008), performative comedy (Lockyer, 2010, 2011, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c), and religious humor (Feltmate, 2011, 2012, 2013). Of note, Davies (1991, 1998) regards jokes to be dependent on the tone in which it is told. Moreover, Lockyer (2015c, p. 599) observes and evaluates “dramatic visual strategies” to be important in the performance, expectation, interaction and intimacy of performative comedians. Humor is not solely psychological or language-based but hinges crucially on the surrounding social influence of people, what we socially see, and what we socially hear.

In terms of present-day humor research, sociologists are actively studying the “globalization of humor” (Kuipers, 2014, p. 714). According to Kuipers (2014),
cross-national diffusion has led to culturally diverse humor audiences that have resulted in growing attention towards social humor mechanisms across cultural context. In examining the psychology, semiotics, and "globalization of humor” at the intercultural setting of Toastmasters, the scholarly direction of this study is broadly in tandem with the disciplines of sociology, linguistics and psychology to relevantly approach the study of humor with a modern lens.

2.2.2 Defining and Specifying the Construct of Humor

Within an anthropology framework, Oring (1992, 2003, 2011) argues that all humor is dependent on the perception of an appropriate incongruity. An appropriate incongruity is the “perception of an appropriate relationship between categories that would ordinarily be regarded as incongruous” (Oring, 2003, p. 1). “ Appropriateness need not be rooted in any kind of logical validity; it requires only a psychological validity” (Oring, 1992, p. 2). Unlike comedy which is generally regarded as the production or performance of humor, humor is generally regarded with a cognitive lens as the perception of an incongruity when disconnecting ideas are suddenly connected in the mind. According to Attardo (2008, p. 103), conceptualizing humor as the “perception of an incongruity between a set of expectations and what is actually perceived” goes back to Aristotle but has been famously restated by other philosophers such as Immanuel Kant who viewed humor as “the play of thought” (Kant, 1790, p. 176, Carrell, 2008, p. 308). Play that is appropriately incongruous has been proposed as the distinguishing feature of humor (Fry, 1963; Oring, 1992; McGhee & Goldstein, 1983). For example, Chafe (2007) prominently advocates that humor is characterized by the feeling of non-seriousness, or playfulness. According to Martin (2007), “humor is essentially a positive emotion called mirth, which is
typically elicited in social contexts by a cognitive appraisal process involving the perception of playful, nonserious incongruity, and which is expressed by the facial and vocal behavior of laughter” (p. 29). By this definition, humor is mainly the positive experience of mirth, which is bodiley expressed at a social setting, elicited by the cognitive appreciation of a playful incongruity.

To include the definitions of humor made in the literature by Anthropology and Philosophy with the prevalent academic approaches of Psychology, Linguistics, and Sociology, a broad definition would be: Humor is the (embodied) perception of an appropriate incongruity, triggered by the play in semiotics by individuals in society. Humor may arise from an individualistic perception, but the socio-cultural entanglement must not be forsaken in a broad specification of humor.

It is critical that the subtle distinction between perception and cognition is highlighted. Broadly, cognition is based on what we think, whereas perception is based on what we sense. According to Bernstein (2018), perception can be split into two processes: (1) processing the objective sensory input (e.g. the propagation in oscillating sound waves allows one to ‘hear’) and (2) processing which is connected to a person's concepts, expectations, knowledge, attention (e.g. subjective experiences allow one to ‘hear’ or ‘sense’ that this propagation of oscillating sound waves is my mother’s excited voice). Technically speaking, perception is a more encompassing concept than cognition because perception can arise from cognition, feelings, or both. Perceiving sensory information includes interoceptive awareness (such as feeling hunger in the gut, feeling qi flow in the interstitium, and sensing a headache in the left temporal lobe), as well as our sense of time, intuition,
proprioception, thermoception, nociception, equilibrioception, etc. Perception is mainly the organization, identification, and interpretation of sensory information in order to represent and understand the presented information, or the environment (Bernstein, 2018).

However, specifically for this study, I construe humor as the embodied cognition of an appropriate incongruity, triggered by the play in semiotics by individuals in society. I have two reasons for not explicitly including ‘perception’ in the working definition. First and more importantly, it will not be sensible to construe humor as an ‘embodied perception’ because the term embodied already implies that perception from our sensory bodies will be taken into account. Second, the concept of ‘cognition’ is arguably more precise than the concept of ‘perception’ to analyze humor in this study. Indubitably, both ‘perception’ and ‘cognition’ are involved in the minds of a Toastmasters audience. However, if I have to select only one over the other for precision in an operational definition, humor, if any, that a Toastmasters audience experiences is more acutely stimulated by one’s cognitive thoughts over and above the perceiving of funny sights and sound. Unlike staged physical comedy, such as professional miming and improvisation visceral acting in groups, Toastmasters speeches are intrinsically more cerebral with less theatrical slapstick. Since the performative content in Toastmasters speeches is largely intellectually driven, cognitive thoughts elicit the awareness of humor more pertinently than the sensory information of sight and sound.

To outline an operational definition: Humor is specified in this study as the embodied cognition of an appropriate incongruity, triggered by the play in semiotics.
by a Toastmasters speaker communicating at a sociocultural setting to a Toastmasters audience.

2.3 The Empirical Studies of Humor and Rhetoric

Humor and rhetoric on their own have been widely studied. However, the research integrating both humor and rhetoric is sporadic, and the two theoretical constructs are not usually examined together. There are not many academic papers that analyzed the relation between humor and rhetoric as its primary objective. In this section, I review seven empirical studies that investigated the niche intersection.

Most of the published empirical work that investigated the intersection of these two theoretical constructs did so by focusing on the effects of humor in rhetoric. For example, Diane Martin (2004) advocates that applying humor is important in political rhetoric for a female. Martin (ibid.) analyzed three political speeches by the first elected woman governor of Texas, Ann Richards, and writes that Ann Richards “used humor to successfully negotiate (her) conflicting and constraining roles” (p. 273), such as the role of national political party outsider versus Texas insider, and the role of woman versus politician. According to Martin (ibid.), Ann Richards “used humor as a tactic for negotiating and reorganizing superiority and subordination of gender expectations in public life” (p. 273). Martin (ibid.) substantiates her arguments with the actual speeches made by Ann Richards and is sharp in her interpretive-analysis to also acknowledge the regional, sociopolitical, and cultural factors influencing the effects of humor. In so doing, Martin (ibid.) has shown that humor does have utility for negotiating in political rhetoric and gender is a factor that impacts the function of humor in rhetoric.
In another example, Smith (1993) examined the Southern humor of American culture based on the local-colored, vernacular writings of five distinguished writers. Smith (ibid.) argues that the use of humor is effective in rhetoric when it is effective as a social and cultural argument. Smith (ibid.) explains with examples how American writers in the South “use humor to make significant arguments about the nature of the region’s culture and politics, rhetorically reconstructing reality and influencing consequent behavior for the members of that distinctive subculture” (p. 51). While Smith (ibid.) is persuasive in general, his extrapolation that humor functions to reconstruct reality and influence behavior can be overly optimistic about the actual effects of humor. The idea that reading humorous content can influence actual behavioral change, because humor changes one’s opinion and reconstructs one’s reality, is debatable. One’s perception of reality may be reconstructed momentarily when interacting with humor, but this rhetorical reconstruction may not be lasting in time and behavioral in effect. Nevertheless, the empirical study of “Humor as rhetoric and cultural argument” by Smith (ibid.) is compelling. Among all the academic studies that had humor and rhetoric in its title, Smith (ibid.) has the highest citation count when the ‘allintitle: humor rhetoric’ search function on Google Scholar is applied in December 2018. There is validity that humor in rhetoric functions to make a cultural statement.

Another empirical work that has examined the effects of humor in rhetoric is Orkibi (2016). Orkibi explains how Internet memes on Facebook operate as a protest rhetoric against Nicolas Sarkozy, who was the President of France from 2007 to 2012. Orkibi examined eight Internet images that were published online between
April 2007 to September 2009. Orkibi argues that through ridicule and vilification of the French President, the humor in Internet memes functions as a form of protest against perceived injustice. According to Orkibi (ibid.), humor in the rhetoric of memes serves as an argument *of* the people, rather than an argument *for* the people, to “shape antagonism” (p. 559). Orkibi accounts for the political context in France with his insider perspective and is careful in his assertions. It is hard to disagree that the (underlying) hostility in some Internet memes is functional to subvert authority. The protest (or subversive) *function* of humor in the rhetoric of memes is corroborated in other empirical works (e.g. Shifman, 2014, West, 2017, Woods, 2018).

Of note, both *function* and *mechanism* of humor in rhetoric at the workplace has been investigated in Magalhaes & Andreoni (2014). Two hundred individuals from southeastern Brazil with college-level jobs in ten mid-size corporations were asked to answer 12 questions on a 4-point Likert Scale (e.g. ‘Always’, ‘Often’, ‘Sometimes’, ‘Never’) and to add comments to explain more if they wished to. Magalhaes and Andreoni (ibid.) report that “humor in the organization are defined by its rhetoric function: to conquer the audience and cause relaxation (Quintilian, transl. 1976) while keeping socially acceptable behavior (Cicero, transl. 1996) by not surpassing the boundaries set by respectability” (p. 5; verbatim quote). Extrapolating from the results that 68.5% of respondents indicated ‘Always’ to the question ‘When at work, I play in order to relieve stress’, and only 11.5% of respondents indicated ‘Never’ to the question ‘*I feel my performance improves when I play a little at work*’, the authors discuss that humor is rhetorically *functional* at work to improve performance via the *mechanism* of relaxation and stress-relief. However,
their methodology of participants self-reporting to explorative questions is not empirically convincing. Their findings can be critiqued as being limited by participants’ self-knowledge and the assumptions inherent in questionnaire questions. For example, question 2 asks if ‘The workplace can be fun’; question 3 asks whether ‘People play during breaks, away from their desks’; question 5 asks whether ‘It is restful in a way to laugh a little during work’ and there are only four Likert Scale options to choose from (e.g. ‘Strong Agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘Disagree’, ‘Strongly Disagree’) in every question. It is inferable that Magalhaes and Andreoni (ibid.) hold a largely positive regard towards the construct of humor, based on how most of their questions were framed to cumulatively operationalize it. Holding an ideologically optimistic view towards the construct of humor is not unique in this study, but pervasive in modern research especially with the rising influence of positive psychology, which systematically disregard research on negative concepts because to focus on the positives (e.g. positive words and positive concepts) is deemed as the better forward for human flourishing (Billig, 2018). Billig (2005) explains that it is conceptually negative to see one’s humor and laughter as being cruel in its core, so we dichotomize that humor can be functionally affiliative or aggressive before positive ideologues strongly emphasize how humor can be affiliative in its effect, rather than to make salient and spotlight that at a causal level, all humor when it is communicative, or rhetorical, ruthlessly ridicules someone or something.

An ideologically darker notion that ‘humor can be communicatively functional at work via the mechanism of mocking inappropriate ideas and ridiculing people who deviate from expected norms so as to (aggressively) shape productive behavior for
people in work organizations’ can also co-exist as true but is not explored in Magalhaes & Andreoni (ibid.). In their discussion section, Magalhaes and Andreoni (ibid.) explicitly acknowledge that their study does not contemplate scorn or the superiority view of humor because their theoretical orientation is Bakhtinian which presupposes humor and laughter as functional to relax from stressful situations. As a result, significantly positive results ($p < .05$) to detail how humor is positively important to bring positive rhetorical functions for the affiliative workplace is (ideologically) provided.

In the four empirical works reviewed thus far, the construct of rhetoric was examined in terms of how it operates as a broad communicative means, but it was not specifically operationalized with the approach that this study will take. As explained in sub-section 2.1.2, this study operationalizes rhetoric, in terms of *logos*, *pathos*, *ethos*, to investigate how humor is applied at the public speaking context of Toastmasters. To the best of my knowledge, via a literature search using the Google Scholar and Web of Science platform, only Weaver (2010), Weaver, (2011), and Weaver (2015) have analyzed humor as rhetoric in terms of *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*.

In Weaver (2010), racist jokes on four websites (i.e. racist-jokes.com, solar-general.com, tightroperecords.com, and blackjokes.net) were examined and the rhetorical framework of *logos*, *pathos*, *ethos* was applied to analyze nine two-liner, racist jokes. Examples include, “**Question:** What’s long and hard on a black man? **Answer:** The first grade.”, “**Question:** Ever hear about the black man who went to college? **Answer:** Neither have I.”, and “**Question:** How do you stop black kids jumping on your bed? **Answer:** Put velcro on the ceiling.” (p. 542-552). Via
inductive and deductive reasoning, Weaver (2010) principally elaborates how jokes reflect cognition, affection, and ethos of the audience. For example, the ethos of racial superiority and extremism, the logic of dehumanization and ambivalence, and the joy in violence and sadism, were used to explain the rhetoric appeals of racist jokes. Weaver (2010) comments that unlike standup comedy where the audience can physically see the comedian, producers of written jokes have to be more imaginative of the ethos of the audience. As such, written jokes are (arguably) more ethos-driven than standup jokes because “written jokes place more emphasis on the audience, who have to evaluate an often anonymous or abstract rhetor” (p. 545).

In Weaver (2011), more ‘Question-and-Answer’ racists jokes were spotlighted for analysis, such as “Q: How long does it take a black lady to shit? A: 9 months.”, “Q: Why are all black people fast? A: Because the slow ones are in jail.”, “Q: Two black guys decide to jump off a building, who lands first? A: Who cares?”, “Q: Why are black peoples [sic] nostrils so big? A: Because that’s what God held them by when he was painting them.”, “Q: What do you call a black man in high school? A: Janitor” (Weaver, 2011, p. 422-426). The main arguments in Weaver (2011) were to show how “racist jokes can act as important rhetorical devices for serious racisms” (p. 413), “critique Raskin’s (1985) definition of the ethnic joke as that which always contains an ethnic script” (p. 423), and to further deconstruct that the logos of racist humor contain “two key logics - inclusion and exclusion” (p. 431). Specifically, “the inclusion of the ‘other’ through inferiorization and the exclusion of the ‘other’ through proteophobia” (p. 432) is argued to operate as the logic behind racist humor.

In Weaver (2015), seven ‘Question-and-Answer’ anti-Semitic jokes from one extant
website (i.e. www.racist-jokes.info) were spotlighted for detailed analysis. Examples include, “Why do Jews have such big noses? Because air is free!”, “What do Jewish women make for dinner? Reservations!” and “What’s the difference between a Jew and a pizza? Pizzas don’t scream when they are put in the oven!” (Weaver, 2015, p. 332-337). Mainly, Weaver (2015) explains that the character appeal of anti-Jewish jokes is in the “character of the joker” reading the joke since the website is associated to the extreme US right, the emotional appeal of racist humor resides in feelings of “identification”, and the logical appeal of racist humor includes “prejudicial” logic. Weaver (2015) also explicitly “argued for a return to a narrow, Aristotelian informed approach because it offers the clearest description of how humor can convince. Despite the age of some of the ideas, they rarely inform the content of articles on humor or in HUMOR, and thus the need to assert this method for mainstream consumption is evident” (p. 342; original emphasis).

One notes that the research articles by Weaver (2010), Weaver (2011), and Weaver (2015) are grossly simplified here and that studying the original articles for the depth in details is recommended. What is most critically relevant to this thesis is that the studies in Weaver (2010, 2011, 2015) conceptualize rhetoric in terms of logos, pathos, ethos and provide empirical grounding with actual data showing that cognition, affection, and character do relate to humor. I am inspired and will move with Weaver’s (2010, 2011, 2015) academic endeavors and examine, via inductive reasoning as well, how the rhetoric of humor comprises the appeals of logic, emotion, and character.

It must be emphasized that jokes do not only exist in the format of ‘Question-and-
Answer’ that Weaver (2010, 2011, 2015) has analyzed. Jokes can also be embedded in a narrative structure that surface as part of a story being presented. Moreover, written jokes, in their intrinsic format, are typically not accompanied by vocal variations and visual expressions. Jokes, when performed at a public speaking setting, are characteristically multimodal with the audio-and-visual semiotics crucially impacting how humorous a rhetoric is, more so than using the language of words alone. Furthermore, Weaver (2010, 2011, 2015) did not analyze the rhetoric of humor in the context of laughter. Laughter as a response to jokes performed in a multimodal and narrative format would be analyzed in this study to advance the empirical research studying the niche intersection between humor and rhetoric.

2.4 Literature Gaps that Led to the Research Question

According to Alvesson & Sandberg (2013), there are three types of research gaps to look for, in order to generate a meaningful research question: (1) an established gap in the literature that addressing the research question will reduce, (2) a conflicting gap in the literature due to competing explanations that addressing the research question will bridge, and (3) an unexplored gap in the literature that addressing the research question will fill.

When I looked into the literature of rhetoric and humor, it is evident that the construct of rhetoric and the construct of humor are rarely associated. Web of Science is a Citation-Index Service that gives comprehensive access to multiple databases in all academic and scientific disciplines. According to a Web of Science all Databases search on 1st January 2018, there were 34,007 research papers with 'rhetoric' as its topic and 33,542 research papers with 'humor' as its topic. There were
however only 77 research papers with both 'rhetoric' and 'humor' as its topic. This suggests that the scholarly association between rhetoric and humor is weak. When the Web of Science search was refined to include only published research articles, there were 8,756 research articles with 'rhetoric' in its title, 7,819 research articles with 'humor' in its title, and only 17 research articles with both 'rhetoric' and 'humor' in its title. Scholars do investigate the relation between rhetoric and humor as its primary objective, but they are of a paucity. Specifically, 7 research articles in 1965 to 2006 and 10 research articles in 2007 to 2017 investigated the niche intersection. Research integrating both constructs of humor and rhetoric was sporadic in the last ten years between 2007 to 2017, but on an overall trend, as compared to the 1965 to 2006 period, this intersection of research is gaining traction.

Among the 17 indexed research articles, Smith (1993), Martin (2004), Orkibi (2016), Magalhaes & Andreoni (2014), Weaver (2010), Weaver (2011) and Weaver (2015) were reviewed in the previous section. How empirical studies investigated the intersection of humor and rhetoric in (i) political speeches, (ii) vernacular writing, (iii) Internet memes, (iv) the workplace, and (v) racist jokes were reviewed. Of note, both Weaver (2011, p. 432) and Weaver (2015, p. 344) conclude that there are limited studies that employ a rhetorical analysis of humor as its methodology. There is indeed a research gap and more studies to unpack how humor is rhetorical would reduce the (established) gap.

When I looked into the literature of humor, it is evident that there are competing explanations of laughter due to humor. Researchers do not agree with each other on how best to explain the humor in laughter. This is in part due to the “sheer
elusiveness of the phenomena under investigation” (Martin, 2007, p. 28). Individuals are amused and not amused varyingly by diverse stimuli and situations (Dixon, 1980). For every joke that receives laughter and no-laughter, there are differing well-founded explanations (Berger, 2013). What complicates the study of laughter due to humor is the variable of ‘unlaughter’. ‘Unlaughter’ describes “a display of not laughing when laughing might otherwise be expected, hoped for or demanded” (Billig, p.192) According to Billig (2005), humor, laughter, and unlaughter are paradoxical; these three concepts are (i) universal yet particular, (ii) social yet anti-social, (iii) mysterious yet understandable. The three paradoxes of humor, laughter, and unlaughter, contribute to the elusive nature of humorous laughter which in turn contributes to “the multiplicity of theories that have been proposed to account for it” (Martin, 2007, p. 28).

What complicates the study of humor in laughter is also laughter’s relation to humor in the first place. According to Attardo (2015, p. 170), “Laughter does not always follow jokes: laughter, far from being exclusively a reaction to humor, is used by speakers to signal a variety of meanings”; “there can be laughter without humor and humor without laughter”. Even if the construct of interest is delimited to only laughter due to humor, there are still different explanations to account for why people ‘laugh’ out of the experience of ‘humor’. Laughter due to humor has been explained in terms of: the cognitive shift from a serious frame to a playful frame (Morreall, 2009a), semantic-script oppositions (Raskin, 1986), logical mechanisms (Attardo, 2001), incongruity-resolution (Ritchie, 1999), the feeling of superiority (Duncan, 1985), the feeling of non-seriousness (Chafe, 2007), release of suppressed desires (Freud, 1905), appropriate incongruities (Oring, 2003), false logic (Palmer,
1987), the play of thought (Kant, 1790), benign violations of immoral behavior (McGraw & Warren, 2010), and ridicule (Billig, 2005). It is however glaring that researchers try to explain laughter due to humor with one or two factors. Can laughter due to humor be explained with the tri-factors of logos, pathos, and ethos? Will a three-factor explanation of laughter be more convincing? Would the determinants of logic, emotion, and character bring (i) unique explanatory variance to (ii) maximize total explanatory power (iii) while not incurring imprudent error variance at the same time?

When I looked into the literature of Toastmasters, it is evident that there is no academic inquiry into the winning Toastmasters' speeches. As at 1st January 2018, according to a Web of Science all Databases search, there were 16 research papers on the topic of Toastmasters, of which 11 are research articles. For example, Nordin and Shaari (2005) conducted a study implementing a series of Toastmasters meetings in a class of second language (L2) learners in Malaysia. Qualitative results from interview questionnaires point to the Toastmasters format of pedagogy being useful to help L2 learners ($n = 65$) enhance their speaking skills. Yu-Chih (2008) carried out a study that translates the format of a typical Toastmasters club-meeting to an EFL (English as Foreign Language) oral-communication class in Taiwan. Results based on the self-reports of students ($n = 18$) point to improvement in English language and public-speaking proficiency, as well as in social and affective skills. Yu-Chih (ibid.) discusses that the Toastmasters approach offers an authentic student-centered learning environment that stimulates learning through cooperation and autonomy. In Hsu (2011), whether campus Toastmasters clubs enhance their

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1 Information describing the winning Toastmasters' speeches is provided in section 4.1.
student members' global awareness is examined. Through conducting focus group and individual interviews of 60 Toastmasters student members from 20 college Toastmasters clubs in Taiwan, Hsu (ibid.) discusses and explicates how the cooperative structure of Toastmasters facilitates the promotion of globalization and internationalization views.

Most evidently, when reviewing the 11 published research articles on Toastmasters, the empirical research done was all based at a school setting. Students were either asked for their views or the Toastmasters pedagogy was incorporated into an existing teaching format. It is imperative to note that students only form 3.9% of the member demographics at Toastmasters (Toastmasters CEO Report, 2017). 74.5% of members in Toastmasters are at least 35 years old and 82.9% of members are working professionals in society. Thus, the empirical research on Toastmasters, so far, is not representative of its key demographics. To the best of my knowledge, there is also no naturalistic research done on Toastmasters of their International Speech Contests at the club-level, area-level, division-level, and district-level. There is also no academic study published with the World Championship of Public Speaking® (WCPS®) as its dataset of inquiry.

To address the three literature gaps identified, the following research question is formulated. How is humor used as rhetoric in the winning Toastmasters' speeches? Addressing this research question will endeavor to (1) reduce the established gap

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1 More details of the 2017 Toastmasters CEO report are provided in section 4.1.

2 The World Championship of Public Speaking® (WCPS®) is organized and regulated by Toastmasters International (TI®).
between rhetoric and humor, (2) bridge the conflicting gap among explanations of laughter due to humor, and (3) fill the unexplored gap of the lack of academic inquiry into the winning Toastmasters' speeches.
Chapter 3:
Analytical Framework

In the previous chapter, the gap between the theoretical construct of humor and the theoretical construct of rhetoric was identified. In this chapter, an interrogative framework is assembled to reduce the established gap. The Humor-Rhetoric-7 is the interrogative framework put forth to integrate both constructs for close examination. The Humor-Rhetoric-7 is a constellation of 7 interrogative factors synthesized to be most relevant to study humor in rhetoric. The interrogative framework (i.e. the Humor-Rhetoric-7) is underpinned by the approaches of social semiotics and psychodynamics as the analytical framework for this study. How the analytical framework operates is illustrated with an example in Section 3.3.

3.1 An Interrogative Framework to Analyze Humor as Rhetoric

Using interrogatives in an analytical framework employs interrogation questions (such as when, where, who, what, why) to construct knowledge. An interrogative model for scientific inquiry is most notably employed and advocated by Finnish philosopher and logician Jaakko Hintikka (1981, 1992, 1999). Inquiry is “the action of seeking for truth, knowledge or information about something” (Hintikka & Bachman, 1991, p. 4). An inquirer is not a passive observer but asks interrogative questions to determine the validity of one’s reasoning (Mutanen, 2011).

Interrogative questions to construct knowledge are in the form of Yes-No questions or WH-questions. A Yes-No question (e.g. ‘Were you in Singapore on 11th August 2014?’) is polar in nature. The range of answers is limited to two alternatives. In contrast, a WH-question (e.g. ‘Which country were you in on 11th August 2014?’) is
non-polar in nature. The range of answers is not restricted to two alternatives. To interrogate *When, Where, Who, Which, What, Whom,* and *Why* requires specificity in information. These seven WH-questions are therefore asked to analyze humor as rhetoric:

- WH-question 1: *When* is humor rhetorical?
- WH-question 2: *Where* is the rhetorical humor taking place?
- WH-question 3: *Who* creates (& who perceives) the rhetorical humor?
- WH-question 4: *Which* form of humor is rhetorical?
- WH-question 5: *What* generates the rhetorical humor?
- WH-question 6: *Whom* is the rhetorical humor jabbing?
- WH-question 7: *Why* is humor rhetorical?

Because WH-questions demand specificity and cannot be answered with a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’, there is an underlying ‘how’ that is being asked in each WH-question. In attempting to explain all seven WH-questions, varied and valuable datapoints are produced. Consequently, these datapoints can be assimilated to holistically answer how humor is used as rhetoric.

How the seven WH-questions can integrate as mechanisms to explain the rhetoric in humor is depicted in Figure 3.1. A bright red arrow indicates a clockwise moment and a dark red arrow indicates an anti-clockwise moment. The whole gear system spins in motion only *when* the first gear spins. Depicting this analogy is important to illustrate the importance of WH-question 1 on the system of interrogatives to explain how humor is rhetorical. Before rhetorical humor is interrogated with WH-questions,
it is pivotal to first establish when is humor rhetorical. WH-question 1 does not assume that humor is rhetorical, but embedded in WH-questions 2 to 7 is the assumption that humor is already rhetorical for explication of the details.
Figure 3.1: An Analogy of The Seven Interrogatives working as Mechanisms to Explain how Humor is used as Rhetoric

Analysis Starts only **WHEN** the Humor has Sufficient Activation Energy to be Rhetorical

- **How** is Humor Used as Rhetoric?
- **When** is Humor Rhetorical?
- **Where** is the Rhetorical Humor Taking Place?
- **Who** Creates (& **Who** Perceives) the Rhetorical Humor?
- **Which** form of Humor is Rhetorical?
- **Whom** is the Rhetorical Humor Jabbing?
- **Why** is Humor Rhetorical?
- **What** Generates the Rhetorical Humor?

Note: Turning in a clockwise direction or in an anti-clockwise direction matters because each adjacent gear has to spin in an opposite direction for all wheel mechanisms to move. Additionally, the gears do not spin sequentially (step-by-step) but can only spin together (in an all-or-nothing manner).
In this study, rhetoric is specified as the use of logos, pathos, ethos to communicate. Humor is specified as the embodied cognition of an appropriate incongruity, triggered by the play in semiotics by individuals in society. Synthesizing the key constituents of what defines rhetoric and humor, Humor-Rhetoric (or interchangeably Rhetorical Humor) is specified as the effective use of logos, pathos, ethos that elicits in an audience the embodied cognition of semiotic play.

In social sciences research, a variable is a factor of analysis that is liable to vary or change (Berg, 2004). Interrogating how humor is used as rhetoric with the seven interrogatives resulted in the assembly of seven humor-rhetoric variables, or factors of analysis, namely: (i) Embodied Cognition, (ii) Location, (iii) Producer-Consumer Relation, (iv) Semiotic Mode, (v) Technique, (vi) Target, and (vii) Appeal. Table 3.1 shows how each interrogation question resulted in a corresponding variable. Table 3.2 describes the purpose for each humor-rhetoric variable. Table 3.1, Table 3.2, Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2 (to follow) are my own original work.

Table 3.1: The Seven Interrogation Questions that Resulted in the Seven Variables to Question How is Humor is used as Rhetoric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interrogation Question</th>
<th>Corresponding Variable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. When is humor rhetorical?</td>
<td>Embodied Cognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Where is the rhetorical humor taking place?</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Who creates (&amp; who perceives) the rhetorical humor?</td>
<td>Producer-Consumer Relation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Which form of humor is rhetorical?</td>
<td>Semiotic Mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What generates the rhetorical humor?</td>
<td>Technique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Whom is the rhetorical humor jabbing?</td>
<td>Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Why is humor rhetorical?</td>
<td>Appeal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.2: Description and Purpose of the Seven Humor-Rhetoric Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humor-Rhetoric Variables</th>
<th>Description and Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Embodied Cognition</td>
<td>Operates as a criterion to indicate when humor is rhetorical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Location</td>
<td>Accounts for where the rhetorical humor takes place, in terms of the physical and sociocultural setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Producer-Consumer</td>
<td>Accounts for who creates (&amp; who perceives) the rhetorical humor and their relational-dynamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Semiotic Mode</td>
<td>Accounts for which form of (meaning-making) play triggers the rhetorical humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Technique</td>
<td>Accounts for what generates the rhetorical humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Target</td>
<td>Accounts for whom the rhetorical humor jabs at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Appeal</td>
<td>Accounts for why the rhetorical humor resonates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since seven variables are examined, the interrogative framework to inquire how humor is used as rhetoric is termed: The Humor-Rhetoric-7. The Humor-Rhetoric-7 is a constellation of 7 variables, or factors of analysis, synthesized to be most relevant to study how humor is rhetorical. The seven factors of analysis are collectively depicted in Figure 3.2 as a heptagram, which is a seven-pointed star drawn with seven straight strokes. The purpose of Figure 3.2 is to capture the essence of the interrogative framework that I put forth with a concise image; it is not meant to be deterministic in terms of the interrogative factors to analyze humor as rhetoric. In addition, it must be emphasized that the focus of the Humor-Rhetoric-7 is to interrogate the mechanisms (i.e. the causes) influencing how humor is rhetorical. The Humor-Rhetoric-7 does not seek to interrogate, or to investigate, the functional effects (e.g. practical purposes, societal impact, political impact) of rhetorical humor.
3.1.1 Embodied Cognition [When]

Embodied Cognition operates as a criterion to indicate when humor is rhetorical. Embodied expressions of cognition, arising from humor, can manifest in different behavioral gestures such as a smile, a laugh, an attentional eye-gaze, a chuckle, a condescending snigger with a short expulsion of breath, or even an unconscious throwing back of the head and spine to open up one’s body. An embodiment view of humor is however not unequivocal. There is a perspective in the literature that a purely mental, cognitive perception (and resolution) of an appropriate incongruity can suffice to indicate that humor is inherent (e.g. Oring, 1992, 2003; Ritchie, 2004,
From this perspective, *no embodiment of cognition is required* because the cognition of humor alone can suffice to indicate the humor being existential. This study does not disagree with this perspective but emphasizes that *embodied expressions of cognition* (such as laughing, or smiling, or an interested eye-gaze) *are required as a social communicative criterion* to indicate *when*, or when not, is the cognition of humor rhetorical. If an inherently-humorous poster does not elicit an embodied expression (e.g. a smile or a split-second snigger), I would regard that the inherently-humorous poster is not rhetorically-humorous enough in that sociocultural setting for a particular audience at that moment of time.

The body-based expression of *laughing* is distinctly recognizable and is often instinctively associated with humor (Fry, 1994; Moalla, 2015; Provine, 2001). Current research in the literature however demonstrates that the body-based response of *smiling* may be a more useful marker to indicate the presence of humor. Gironzetti and Menjo (2014) and Gironzetti et al. (2016) report that conversational partners display synchronic smiling and smile more intensely when humor is present in the conversation. Characteristically, during face-to-face dyadic interactions, both speakers and listeners “mark the presence of humor” at humorous portions of the conversation “by smiling at a higher intensity and matching each other’s smiling intensity more” (Gironzetti, 2017, p. 408). By employing the Facial Action Coding System (FACS) as the empirical method to code and analyze Action Units (AUs) of the face, Gironzetti (2017) reports that smiling indexes humor better than laughter at a dyadic, conversational setting. When people experience humor in conversations, it is more likely that they respond by smiling rather than laughing. A Smiling Intensity Scale was consequently proposed as a criterion framework for future studies. The
Smiling Intensity Scale examines Action Units (AUs) of the face and has five levels:

Level 0 - “Neutral”, no smile; Level 1 - “Closed Mouth Smile”, no teeth can be seen;

Level 2 - “Open Mouth Smile”, only upper teeth are seen; Level 3 - “Wide Open Mouth Smile”, both upper and lower teeth are seen; Level 4 - “Laughing Smile”, both upper and lower teeth are clearly seen, and jaws are dropped (Gironzetti, 2017, p. 410).

Table 3.3: The Five Levels of the Smiling Intensity Scale, which was Published in Gironzetti (2017, p. 410)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 0</td>
<td>Neutral. No smile, no flexing of the zygomaticus (no AU12), may show dimpling (AU14) or squinting of the eyes (AU6 or AU7), but no raised side of the mouth (no AU12). The mouth may be closed or open (AU25 or AU26).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Closed mouth smile. Shows flexing of the zygomaticus (AU12), may show dimpling (AU14) and flexing of the orbicularis oculi (caused by AU6 or AU7).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Open mouth smile. Showing upper teeth (AU25), flexing of the zygomaticus (AU12), may show dimpling (AU14) and flexing of the orbicularis oculi (AU6 or AU7).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Wide open mouth smile. Shows flexing of the zygomaticus (AU12), flexing of the orbicularis oculi (AU6 or AU7), and may show dimpling (AU14). 3A: showing lower and upper teeth (AU25), or 3B: showing a gap between upper and lower teeth (AU25 and AU26).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Laughing smile. The jaw is dropped (AU25 and AU26 or AU27), showing lower and upper teeth, flexing of the zygomaticus (AU12), flexing of the orbicularis oculi (AU6 or AU7), and possibly dimpling (AU14).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As reported in Table 3.3, at the highest level of smiling, there is an embodied expression that is coded to be facially similar to the expression when laughing.

Empirical evidence from the FACS method indicates that physiologically speaking, in terms of facial activation units, we smile into a laugh. Therefore, if smiling is one way to embody cognition of humor when listening in conversations, so is the response of laughter when listening to a rhetoric. During a dyad (i.e. a group of two people) conversation, smiling may mark humor better than laughter. However, for a public-speaking rhetoric presented to a live audience of at least a thousand people,
laughter is a more feasible criterion to mark humor as compared to quantifying the collective smiles from the audience.

Extrapolating from the research that argues for different levels and intensities when smiling, it is conceivable too that there are different levels and intensities of audience laughter. Audience laughter that erupts and sustains organically for 10 seconds is inferably more humorously rhetorical as compared to audience laughter that naturally dies off after 4 seconds. In the first place, to provoke 4 seconds of audience laughter in any context is not a common occurrence, let alone 10 seconds. To purport that, at a similar setting, 1 second vs 4 seconds vs 10 seconds of audience laughter reflect different levels (or different intensities) of rhetorical humor at play would not be undue.

Fundamentally, audience laughter will duly be elicited when the humor is sufficiently funny enough in its activation energy to be rhetorical. Be it 500 milliseconds, 1 second, or 3 seconds of naturalistic laughter, specifying a criterion to establish when a moment of humor is rhetorical is necessary. This is because the other six humor-rhetoric variables assume that humor is already rhetorical for details to be explicated. Demarcating the margins of when, or when not, is humor rhetorical is pivotal for a systematic interrogation of humor as rhetoric.

3.1.2 Location [Where]
Location accounts for where the humor-rhetoric takes place. This variable cannot be unaccounted for when analyzing humor. Both the physical setting of the location and the social environment in the location are crucial in influencing the experience of
humor. Quirk (2011) interviewed ten British standup comedians to investigate how the features of a venue impact comedic performance, and reports that hard chairs are intentionally used in standup bars to induce the audience to be more upright and ready to laugh. Chairs with curvatures in their struts are also preferred because the meanders in a curve induce ease and playfulness more so than unimaginative, straight pieces of stable wood (de Botton, 2006). Standup bar owners also curate the social environment to be as densely packed as possible because when people sit close together in an enclosed location, they are more amenable (i.e. suggestible) to one another (Brook, 1988). Additionally, the cultural ideology at a social setting influences the rhetoric of humor. This is glaring in the rhetoric of humor in wrestling entertainment. Atkinson (2002) analyzed selected professional wrestling episodes between 1993-2000 and argues that through a “mock battle” formula of staged competition, hyperbolic and unapologetic mannerisms entertain audiences. Wrestling entertainers consistently ridicule one another for the battle of top status (e.g. in the famously fictitious but crowd-pleasing feud between “Stone Cold” Steve Austin and Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson). Because of the cultural ideology embedded in the locational environment, the rhetoric of humor has to be aggressive and self-enhancing at this social setting. Self-deprecating humor is almost never used by wrestlers when they are publicly speaking in the wrestling ring because it is customary that wrestlers show ambition for a fight. Broadly, both the physical features and the sociocultural setting of the location shape the experience of humor.

3.1.3 Producer-Consumer Relation [Who]

Producer-Consumer Relation accounts for who creates (& who perceives) the humor and their relational-dynamic that has to be inquired when analyzing rhetorical
humor. For example, pre-existing differences in power and status can influence humor production and appreciation. Coser (1960) has observed that subordinates laughed more when their superiors made humorous remarks, in comparison to when humorous remarks were made among themselves. Holmes & Marra (2002) has reported that people with lower status tend to use humor to subvert or challenge authority as a socially acceptable means versus people in power who may use humor to maintain control. The demographic profile (e.g. gender, ethnicity, nationality, age-group, social status) inherent in a speaker will influence how a consumer-audience experiences the produced humor. The same produced humor that is rhetoric to a specified consumer group (e.g. Toastmasters) will not necessarily be rhetoric to a different consumer group (e.g. orphanage children). Humor appreciation being impacted by who is telling (& who is hearing) the joke is demonstrated in an experimental study conducted by McGraw, Warren, Williams & Leonard (2012). McGraw et al. (ibid.) invited 90 participants to their lab for a computer-based task and randomly assigned them to different situational jokes; the situational joke that “somebody accidentally donated $1,880” is rated as significantly more humorous in the experimental condition when the hearer imagines the joke-teller to be a stranger, as compared to the experimental condition when the hearer imagines the joke-teller to be a close-friend. The relational dynamic of who is telling (& who is hearing) the rhetoric has to be described when analyzing humor. Both the ‘who’ s and the social relationship between the ‘who’ s impact the use of humor in rhetoric.

3.1.4 Semiotic Mode [Which]
Semiotic Mode accounts for which form of (meaning-making) play triggers the humor to be rhetorical. This is based on the presumption that humor is perceived
from the (semiotic) play with meanings. Immanuel Kant regards humor as “the play of thought” (Kant, 1790, p. 176). Paul McGhee (1979) describes humor as the play with reality in complex ways when we have the capacity to see multiple meanings. Michael Apter (1991) espouses the paratelic (i.e. playful) frame of mind as essential for humor, in contrast to the telic (i.e. serious, goal-directed) state of mind. The mental play of thoughts as necessary for humor is also advocated in other research papers (e.g. Barnett, 1990, 1991; Bergen, 1998, 2002, 2003; McGhee, 1971a, 1971b). For humor to be perceived, some form of playing with meanings is presumed to have happened in the mind.

Semiotics is a technical term, mostly employed in the linguistics discipline, to explain how signs make meaning. Meaning is made primarily from the signs arising from our senses (e.g., sight, smell, taste) as well as the signs arising from our language (e.g. English, العربية, 汉字, Español, Tiếng Việt). Mental meanings are created in an individual’s mind through two sign-channels: the sensory input from the environment and our cognizant language for sense-making (Chandler, 2017). We construct experiences mainly through our senses and the language we know. Accordingly, humor is triggered mainly by the semiotic modes of language and the sensory input from the environment (i.e. what we see, hear, smell, taste, touch). When experiencing rhetoric, the audience is mainly stimulated by language and the sensory stimulations of sight and hearing. Correspondingly, there are mainly three semiotic modes that trigger the play of thought in an audience: (i) the Language mode, (ii) the Visual mode, and (iii) the Audio mode. Table 3.4 describes how the play and interplay of the three semiotic modes of Language (i.e. words), Visual (i.e. what is seen) and Audio (i.e. what is heard) trigger humor.
Table 3.4: How the Play and Interplay in the Semiotic Modes of Language, Visual, Audio Trigger the Embodied Cognition of Humor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semiotic Play</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Play</td>
<td>The play in Language triggers the humor.</td>
<td>Smiling when we read joke books that has no audio component and uses no accompanying visual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Play</td>
<td>The play in Visuals triggers the humor.</td>
<td>Chuckling when we see the silent, slapstick comedy of Charlie Chaplin that has no words and no audio stimulus transmitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio Play</td>
<td>The play in Audio triggers the humor.</td>
<td>Laughing because we hear a funny audio (e.g. a weird sound or the sounds of others laughing) that involves no visual stimulus and no language words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language + Visual Interplay</td>
<td>The play in Language + Visuals triggers the humor.</td>
<td>Smiling when we appreciate the appropriate incongruity in memes, which are typically witty images with words and involve no audio stimulus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language + Audio Interplay</td>
<td>The play in Language + Audio triggers the humor.</td>
<td>Smiling from the humor in podcasts/ audiobooks/ radio broadcasts due to the words spoken, which has an audio quality and no accompanying visuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual + Audio Interplay</td>
<td>The play in Visuals + Audio triggers the humor.</td>
<td>Chuckling when we watch Just for Laughs pranks on TV, which typically employ audio laugh-tracks and transmit no stimulus of words for the viewer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language + Visual + Audio Interplay</td>
<td>The play in Language + Visuals + Audio triggers the humor.</td>
<td>Laughing during comedy shows and movies, because of the stimuli of language words, visuals seen, and audio-components heard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The Language mode refers to the use of words and every symbol in a word is fundamentally a semiotic (i.e. meaning-making) sign. The Language mode consists of the use of different words, morphemes, grammar, word choices, organization of words into sentences, paragraphs, and texts for meaning-creation. The Visual mode refers to the semiotic signs of what is seen. Besides seeing the symbols that comprise words, the Visual mode includes seeing colors, textures, facial expressions, bodily gestures, and spatial depth. The Audio mode refers to the semiotic signs of what is heard. Besides hearing the spoken word, the Audio mode includes hearing components such as vocal tone, pitch changes, volume of speech, tunes of rhythm, and concocted sound effects.

The Language, Visual, and Audio modes are the three main semiotic modes that trigger the play in meaning-making for an audience’s humor experience. If we delimit semiotic modes to only the modes of Language, Visual and Audio, there are at least seven forms of semiotic play that trigger the embodied cognition of humor which Table 3.4 outlines. Humor-Rhetoric, as defined earlier, is specified as the effective use of logos, pathos, ethos that elicits in an audience the embodied cognition of semiotic play. Reporting on which semiotic modes play and interplay to trigger humor is necessary to document the semiotic play in humor.

Fundamentally, to examine semiotic play is to examine how the play of signs (via semiotic modes) produces the meaning of humor. In the analysis of punchlines to explain humor, the modality of language words is often examined as the trigger of humor (e.g. Attardo, 1998). While the experience of humor is often triggered via the Language modality of words, the influence of the Visual and Audio modalities in
impacting the extent to which a punchline is effective cannot be neglected. To be rhetorical in public-speaking communication, the semiotic of visuals seen and the semiotic of audio components are also important for the trigger, or punchline, of humor. By documenting the varying semiotics used in rhetoric, trails of evidence are available to be used to explain humor.

3.1.5 Technique [What]

Technique accounts for what generates the humor-rhetoric. What specifically incites humor has been investigated in the humor literature in terms of techniques. For example, Berger (1976, 1993, 1997, 2005, 2013) has outlined 45 techniques to produce humor, grouped into 4 categories: language (the humor is verbal), logic (the humor is ideational), identity (the humor is existential), and action (the humor is physical). Barry (2013a, 2013b) outlined 41 devices to produce humor, grouped into 10 categories: 4 categories for incongruity humor, 3 categories for superiority humor and 3 categories for relief humor. Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004), on the other hand, have developed a taxonomy of 41 audiovisual humor techniques, grouped into 7 categories: slapstick, clownish humor, misunderstanding, surprise, irony, parody, and satire. The taxonomy of techniques by Berger (1997, 2005, 2013), Barry (2013a, 2013b), and Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004) are shown in Tables 3.5, 3.6, and 3.7, respectively. Examples of how each technique provokes humor were provided in their papers.
Table 3.5: Berger’s (1997, 2005, 2013) 45 Humor Techniques within 4 categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. Language</th>
<th>II. Logic</th>
<th>III. Identity</th>
<th>IV. Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. Facetiousness</td>
<td>20. Coincidence</td>
<td>34. Embarrassment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Irony</td>
<td>23. Ignorance</td>
<td>37. Imitation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Repartee</td>
<td>27. Rigidity</td>
<td>41. Scale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Ridicule</td>
<td>28. Theme / Variation</td>
<td>42. Stereotype</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Sarcasm</td>
<td>29. Unmasking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Satire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.6: Barry’s (2013a, 2013b) 41 Humor Devices within 10 categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incongruity Theory</th>
<th>Superiority Theory</th>
<th>Relief Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Exaggeration</td>
<td>V. Putdowns</td>
<td>VIII. Unruliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Perceptual Discord</td>
<td>VI. Awkwardness</td>
<td>IV. Social Order Deviancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Odd Behaviors</td>
<td>26. Remorseful Regrets</td>
<td>34. Society Irreverence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Irony</td>
<td>VII. Malicious Joy</td>
<td>X. Sentimental Humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Ironic Temperament</td>
<td>22. Unanticipated Spoiler</td>
<td>39. Fear &amp; Anxiety Relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Ironic Persona</td>
<td>23. Unfortunate Happenstance</td>
<td>40. Melodrama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25. Cretins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Surprise Twist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Conceptual Surprises</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Plot Trickery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Transformation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Visual Surprise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.7: Buijzen & Valkenburg’s (2004) 41 Humor Techniques within 7 categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. Slapstick</th>
<th>IV. Surprise</th>
<th>VII. Satire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. Clumsiness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Stereotype</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Ridicule</td>
<td>22. Irony</td>
<td>36. Imitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Clownish Humor</td>
<td>26. Scale</td>
<td>40. Repetition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Clownish Behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td>41. Grotesque Appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Anthropomorphism</td>
<td>VI. Parody</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Speed</td>
<td>27. Parody</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29. Rigidity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Misunderstanding</td>
<td>30. Absurdity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Misunderstanding</td>
<td>31. Infantilism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Ignorance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Disappointment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Peculiar Sound</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
A taxonomy is a “scientific classification of ordered categories” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018; Marascuilo & Levin, 1983). There must be a certain amount of breadth of the listed variables first before the scientific classification of the listed variables into ordered categories can begin. Moreover, the listed variables cannot be too general in its description and require meaningful specificity. For example, a recommendation to ‘play with language’ to generate humor is a broad guideline, rather than a technique strictly speaking, because this proposition does not possess meaningful specificity. In contrast, the proposition to ‘use puns’, ‘use allusions’, or ‘be over-literal’, to generate humor can be regarded as a technique because there is meaningful specificity.

To provide both breadth and meaningful specificity in its proposition of techniques so that the taxonomy of humor techniques developed is both expansive and applicable, methodological rigor is required. Berger’s (1997) taxonomy of 45 humor techniques originated from an inductive analysis of verbal narratives - i.e. “joke books, plays, comic books, novels, short stories, comic verse, and essays”. Barry’s (2013a) taxonomy of 41 humor devices emerged from an inductive evaluation of high-performing television advertisements. On the contrary, Buijzen and Valkenburg’s (2004) 41 audiovisual humor techniques had both inductive and deductive elements in their development. Buijzen and Valkenburg’s (2004) taxonomy was developed from audience research of humor preferences and an inductive analysis of 319 humorous audiovisual media before deductive categorical principal-component-analysis (CATPCA) and inter-coder agreement analysis revealed seven factors of audiovisual humor. Among the three taxonomies of humor
techniques reviewed, Buijzen and Valkenburg’s (2004) taxonomy of humor techniques is arguably most empirically robust in its formulation.

The study in this thesis focuses on how humor is used in the rhetoric of public-speaking which is not just a verbal narrative from written jokes or a broadcast commercial. Public-speaking humor is a live performance that integrates both audio and visual communication. A broadcast commercial, on the other hand, is a recorded performance and may not necessarily contain live feedback from a live audience. To analyze the humor in a dataset of public speeches, employing Buijzen and Valkenburg’s (2004) framework of 41 audiovisual humor techniques is reasonably most appropriate and is thus employed to probe into how Toastmasters speakers generate the rhetoric of humor via techniques.

It is relevant to note that in Buijzen and Valkenburg’s (2004) taxonomy of humor techniques, as shown in Table 3.7, six techniques of ‘Imitation’, ‘Impersonation’, ‘Eccentricity’, ‘Sexual Allusion’, ‘Repetition’, and ‘Grotesque Appearance’ failed to load exclusively on the seven factorial-components of (i) Slapstick, (ii) Clownish Humor, (iii) Misunderstanding, (iv) Surprise, (v) Irony, (vi) Parody, and (vii) Satire. However, empirical research that adopted Buijzen and Valkenburg’s (2004) framework almost always include all 41 audiovisual humor techniques. For example, how all 41 humor techniques are applicable in a Catalonia television series and four American sitcoms are studied in Martínez-García (2015) and Juckel, Bellman, & Varan (2016) respectively. Therefore, rather than to exclude the six miscellaneous techniques of ‘Imitation’, ‘Impersonation’, ‘Eccentricity’, ‘Sexual

In describing the ways that humor is incited (e.g. parody, ridicule, puns, slapstick, hysteria), humor techniques seek to account for what specifically is the strategic means. Evaluating what technique specifically generates humor is a vital component of humor-rhetoric inquiry because it directly shows the strategic means the rhetor uses to produce the rhetoric of humor.

3.1.6 Target [Whom]

Target accounts for whom the humor-rhetoric jabs at. Attardo & Raskin (1991) analyzed an extensive corpus of jokes and pronounce the component of Target as a necessary parameter in the analysis of verbal humor. According to Attardo (2017, p. 131), “most jokes are aggressive, and the aggression has a Target”. Specifying the target of a joke is however not easily identifiable for non-aggressive humor (Attardo, 2001; Hempelmann & Ruch, 2005). Attardo (2017, p. 131) published the following non-aggressive joke example: [“Q: What do you get when you cross a cow and a lawnmower? A: A lawnmooer.”] to comment that the Target of the joke can be about “cows”, “lawnmowers”, or “people who mow the lawn”. The Target of the joke can also be ideational. The idea of an inanimate lawnmower mooing is humorous. Whom the humor jabs at does not necessarily have to be about people and can include humor jabbing at ideological concepts (e.g. love), inanimate objects (e.g. traffic lights), institutions (e.g. libraries), animals (e.g. cows). To determine specifically whom the humor jabs at may not always be crystal-clear but inquiring whom the humor jabs at is crucial to unravel meaningful specifics. For example, if
the humor in rhetoric plainly jabs at the system of capitalism repeatedly, the target of
the jabs is meaningful to be specified because characteristic trends can be unraveled.

3.1.7 Appeal [Why]

Appeal accounts for why the rhetorical humor resonates. When humor resonates in
rhetoric, the factor of appeal examines why humor is attractive in a persuasive
manner. According to Aristotle (trans. 2004), there are three rhetoric appeals: logos,
pathos, ethos. Investigating why a humor-rhetoric moment is appealing in terms of
humor-logos, humor-pathos, and humor-ethos is necessary to deconstruct rhetoric
into its constituent elements. Throughout this thesis, humor-logos refers to the
logical appeal of humor; humor-pathos refers to the emotional appeal of humor, and
humor-ethos refers to the character appeal of humor. How do we best explain
humor-logos, humor-pathos, and humor-ethos in humor-rhetoric? Why is humor
appealing in terms of logic, emotions, and character?

Importantly, interrogating the appeal of rhetorical humor should not be directly (or
easily) observable. To illustrate, the beginning laughter instances provided in the
prologue of Chapter 1 are referenced. To say that Russell Peters’ rhetoric is
humorous:

(i) because there is laughter,

(ii) because Mr. Peters said, “Look at all these Indian faces, Jesus Christ!
Look at you, brown bastards, goddamn!”,
(iii) because Mr. Peters used the swearwords of ‘bastards’ and ‘goddamn’ that displayed irreverent behavior\(^1\), and

(iv) because Mr. Peters is jabbing at people who are brown bastards, or is jabbing at the idea of racial stereotypes from which a person’s ethnicity or skin color connotes certain attributes, are all not explaining why humor is rhetorical.

Explanation (i) explains when humor is rhetorical. Explanation (ii) explains which semiotic words trigger humor to be rhetorical. Importantly, the variable of laughter and the variable of semiotic words used are directly observable. Explanation (iii) explains what Technique generates the rhetorical humor. Explanation (iv) explains whom the rhetorical humor Targets. Generally speaking, the variable of Technique and the variable of Target are not directly observable, but they are typically just beneath the surface and can be deduced based on a limited range of possibilities. The variable of Appeal is however most covert and not easily observable. The logical appeal, emotional appeal, and character appeal latent in humor are inherently deep-seated. The inquiry into why humor is rhetorical should not be readily visible to the eye.

The subtle but important distinction between ‘What generates rhetorical humor?’ and ‘Why is rhetorical humor appealing?’ must be emphasized. ‘What makes people laugh?’ versus ‘Why people laugh?’ are two different questions that are often conflated. Akin to ‘What are you speaking?’ versus ‘Why are you speaking?’, the

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\(^1\) Irreverent Behavior is listed as Technique 33 in Buijzen and Valkenburg’s (2004) taxonomy of 41 audiovisual humor techniques (see Table 3.7)
question of ‘What?’ typically requires content to be inquired but the deeper question of ‘Why?’ can go beyond the analysis of content to comprise an idiosyncratic analysis.

The appreciation of rhetorical humor is *idiosyncratic* (i.e. peculiar to an individual). When rhetorical humor is generated at a social setting, there are individuals who laughed out loud for a substantial duration as well as individuals who do not laugh at all in any way. Individuals who do not produce laughter sounds may also be the majority compared to the minority of individuals who produce boisterous laughter sounds. Importantly, analyzing the appeal of rhetorical humor in this study extends to only the (minority of) individuals who spontaneously produced (boisterous) laughter sounds for a sustained duration which can be audibly heard. This is because, if there is no spontaneous laughter, the rhetorical humor may not have appealed to a significant degree for analysis to be justifiably extended to an unlaughing individual. Simply, this study positions itself to inquire why the individuals who laughed laugh and does not position itself to inquire why individuals who did not laugh do not laugh.

Analyzing [i] ‘What generates laughter?’ versus [ii] ‘Why the content that generated laughter is appealing to the individuals who laughed?’ are two different inquiries. Sequentially, we need to address inquiry [i] first before inquiry [ii] can be explored, because inquiry [ii] is deeper and must acknowledge the answer in inquiry [i] so as not to give the same circular answers for inquiries [i] and [ii]. For example, to answer ‘Mockery generates laughter’ for inquiry [i] and then answer ‘Mockery generates laughter because mockery is appealing to some but not all individuals’ for
inquiry [iii] is circular without incisively or deeply explaining why rhetorical humor is appealing to the individuals who laughed.

As much as humor in rhetoric can be analyzed by examining its semiotic content, why humor-rhetoric is attractive in a persuasive manner is largely idiosyncratic. Individual knowledge and understanding, personal likes and dislikes, dispositional attitudes, psychological state of mind, temperament, habits, agreement with the beliefs presented, childhood upbringing, repressed or unconscious traumas, emotional baggage and unique life history all account for the individual variance impacting the logical, emotional, and characterological appeal of humor.

The individualism of humor appreciation points to a psychoanalytic approach for analysis, but humor is still based at a sociocultural setting of semiotic signs triggering the meaning of humor. To account for the sociocultural and idiosyncratic components of humor in rhetoric, social semiotics and psychodynamics are viable analytical approaches for a socio-psychological underpinning of the interrogative framework.

3.2 A Socio-Psychological Underpinning

The analytical framework for this study is the interrogative framework (i.e. the Humor-Rhetoric-7) guided by a socio-psychological underpinning. A socio-psychological underpinning prescribes that both social and psychological factors are addressed in the interrogation of rhetorical humor.

3.2.1 The Analytical Approach of Social Semiotics
Social semiotics emphasizes that human signifying practices of meaning-making are a social practice (Hodge & Kress, 1988). In investigating how communicators use signs, social semiotics is regarded as both a theory and a methodological approach that studies how the social dimensions of meaning influence individuals and shape societies (van Leeuwen, 2005). Social semiotics is rooted in the larger field of Semiotics that, in short, examines how signs produce meaning (Kress, 2009). The analysis of Semiotics is chiefly through semiosis, which refers to the process of signification for the interpretation of meaning (Jewitt, Bezemer & O'Halloran, 2016). In contrast to structural semiotics which focuses primarily on the semiosis of langue (i.e. formal systems of language) to show how linguistic structures influence meaning-making, social semiotics focuses more on the semiosis of parole (i.e. functional use of language) to show how social forces regulate meaning-making. Individuals interpreting the meanings from signs are shaped by the Semiotics in social practices such as cultural factors, power relations, and material interactions. Social semiotics investigates how the various semiotic modes of communication (e.g. verbal, textual, gestural, visual, musical) interplay in social contexts.

The technical terms that are most foundational in Semiotics are sign, signifier, and signified. A sign is anything that communicates a meaning (e.g. words, images, music, materials, food). Signs can be communicated through any of the sensory channels (e.g. visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, interoception, proprioception). Ferdinand de Saussure, a founding figure of modern linguistics, specified that every sign has two components, which he labeled as the signifier and the signified (de Saussure, 1916). A signifier is the physical form of a sign that creates communication. The physical form that is communicated can be a word, a
sound, or an image. A *signifier* denotates the literal, obvious, objective component of a sign. The *signified* is a concept that the signifier refers to. The concept that is associated can be socio-cultural (e.g. money), emotional (e.g. relaxation), or ideological (e.g. communism). A *signified* connotates the ideational, mental, subjective component of a sign. Under a social semiotics underpinning, social overtones influence the signification process (i.e. *semiosis*) of signs, signifiers, signified.

A social semiotic theory of communication emphasizes systems of meaning as fluid, contingent and changing in relation to context, history and culture (Jewitt, Bezemer & O'Halloran, 2016). This emphasis in social semiotics, in addition to *semiosis* as its basis to interpret the meaning behind signs and how meanings are created, is especially relevant to study rhetoric and humor. Rhetoric and humor both require signs (e.g. language words, visual components, audio variety) to communicate. The communication and uptake of meaning in rhetoric and humor are also fluid, contingent and changing in relation to context, history and culture. As much as it is typical of an individual production of rhetoric triggering an individual perception of humor, rhetoric and humor cannot be disentangled from a social setting, embedded as it is in a cultural context. There is a sociocultural underpinning in how individuals produce and consume the semiotics of humor in rhetoric. The approach of social semiotics is appropriate to underpin the interrogation of rhetorical humor.

However, how individuals perceive humor from semiotic signs in rhetoric is also contingent on an idiosyncratic component, apart from sociocultural and linguistic
components. To inquire into the idiosyncratic appeal of humor in rhetoric, a psychodynamics approach is pertinent.

### 3.2.2 The Analytical Approach of Psychodynamics

Psychodynamics examines the dynamics between conscious and unconscious drives to explain the actions of individuals (Horowitz, 1988). To explain the idiosyncratic actions of people, we need to recognize the idiosyncratic (i.e. peculiar to an individual) psyche of people. According to Freud (1900, 1904, 1923), we are all uniquely different, yet we are all similar in that we all have (i) an *ego*, (ii) a *superego*, and (iii) an *id* in our psyche guiding our actions. Figure 3.3 illustrates and describes the three technical terms that are most foundational in psychodynamics: *Ego, Superego, and Id*.

Figure 3.3: An Illustration and Description of the technical terms: *Ego, Superego, Id*
Conscious actions by the ego (i.e. the ‘I’) are largely influenced by the preconscious superego (i.e. the ‘I should’) and the unconscious id (i.e. the ‘I want’). Actions are idiosyncratically decided by the ego of the self who balances and mediates between the dynamic of what I ideally should do versus what I impulsively want to do. The instinctive, irrational drives of the id and the moralistic, rational drives of the superego are constantly in conflict at a subconscious level (i.e. preconscious + unconscious) which emerges in our conscious actions based on the executive mediating ego.

Relating the Idiosyncratic Appeal of Humor to Psychodynamics

Psychodynamics explains that the conscious and unconscious dynamic in our human psyche regulates individualistic behavior. To analyze the behavior of laughter, via
psychodynamics, is to take the perspective that both the conscious and unconscious mind, rather than only the conscious mind, regulates the idiosyncratic appeal of humor. Basically, psychodynamics emphasizes that individual differences in humor appreciation are related to the workings of the conscious and unconscious mind.

Morreall (2009a) explains the appeal of humor as residing in a cognitive shift which he defined as “a rapid change in our perceptions or thoughts” (p. 50). This cognitive shift happens only when we are “disengaged from noetic concerns” (Morreall, 2009b, p. 254). The term ‘noetic’ refers to intellectual and mental activity. This means that, under a cognitive shift approach to explain humor, humor appreciation resides in a sudden change of conscious perceptions or thoughts and unconsciously disengaging from intellectual and mental activity. The cognitive disengagement is unconscious because we do not consciously think to ourselves ‘stop the intellectual and mental activity’. Sover (2009, 2010) elaborates that when we spontaneously laugh due to humor, we do not have to consciously think, we just consciously and unconsciously know it delights us.

The appeal of humor has also been explained as residing in the feeling of superiority. The superiority explanation of humor is often attributed to philosopher, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679). In Human Nature (1650/1999, p. 54-55), Hobbes writes: “The passion of laughter is nothing else but a sudden glory arising from the sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmities of others, or with our own formerly”. Importantly, under a superiority approach to explain the appeal of humor, humor appreciation is not because we think we are superior, but because we feel (consciously and unconsciously) superior due to the
eminency in ourselves relative to the weakness in others or to our past self. Heyd (1982, p. 286) elaborates that the “emotion of glory” that Hobbes is describing refers to “the feeling of superiority, pride, and self-assertion” that “consists of the recognition of one’s power, preeminent abilities, and advantageous position in relation to others which is always joy”. Equating the (conscious and unconscious) feeling of a sudden glory to joy makes sense if the transient emotion of superiority brings pleasure.

The idiosyncratic appeal of humor has also been explained in terms of the relief it offers for suppressed desires. In Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious (1905/1960), Freud describes “jokes as a social process” (p. 171-196) that are “largely motivated by the unconscious mind” (p. 197-223). Freud argues that social inhibitions are released in jokes, offering relief when it reduces tension for the psyche. Under a relief approach to explain humor, a repressive or distressing tension is necessitated in the first place before there can be relief and release of pressurizing energy. The conscious mind is pressurized by societal and parental expectations imposing moralistic and idealistic standards on it. Yet the unconscious mind, as described by Freud with the concept of id, is impulsive, irrational, aggressive and lustful with selfish desires. The production of jokes and the appreciation of jokes (e.g. through smiling and especially via laughing) are regarded as an outlet for the relief and release of suppressed desires respectively.

Elaborating on the Foundational Terms in Psychodynamics

The five concepts that are most foundational in psychodynamics are (i) the conscious mind, (ii) the unconscious mind, (iii) ego, (iv) superego, and (v) id. It is important
that these five concepts and their inter-relations are elaborated clearly because these
five concepts are central to analyzing the idiosyncratic appeal of humor in this study.

Principally, it must be underscored that analyzing the idiosyncratic ego and the
idiosyncretic superego do not mean that social factors are not taken into account. It
is largely through socialization and the internalization of social norms that the
superego is constituted (Rennison, 2015). The ego is also characterized as “the part of
the psychic apparatus that experiences and reacts to the outside world and thus
mediates between the primitive drives of the id and the demands of the social and
physical environment” (Reiche, 2013, p. 40). Rennison (2015) elaborates that the
ego is governed by the reality principle (i.e. the ability of the mind to assess the
reality of the external world, and to act upon it accordingly), the superego is
governed by the morality principle (i.e. the ethical component of personality to
distinguish between right and wrong, acting as a righteous conscience that is partly
unconscious and partly conscious), and the id is governed by the pleasure principle
(i.e. the instinctive seeking of pleasure and avoiding of pain in order to satisfy
biological and psychological needs). Mainly, the psyche of the id is governed by
self-centered factors, but the psyche of the superego and ego are influenced by social
factors. As such, the id has been regarded as analogous to our (individualistic) vices
and the superego to our (individualistic and socialistic) virtues (Jonason & Schmitt,
2014).

Traditionally, the inter-relations of the conscious mind, the unconscious mind, ego,
superego, and id are almost always depicted with the metaphor of an iceberg. By
referring to how Introduction to Psychology textbooks (i.e. Kalat, 2016; Lahey,
2011; Lefton & Brannon, 2006; Myers, 2011; Zimbardo, Johnson & McCann, 2016) illustrate the iceberg metaphor of the psychodynamic psyche, I assembled my own depiction of the iceberg metaphor as the icebergs depicted in Introduction to Psychology textbooks mostly represent the iceberg in a 2-dimensional manner or/and with lots of accompanying words embedded into the image which can obfuscate the clarity of their inter-relations (e.g. Figure 3.3). An iceberg is a 3-dimensional structure, so representing it in a 3-dimensional manner is more accurate.

Figure 3.4: The foundational concepts of (i) the Conscious mind, (ii) the Unconscious mind, (iii) Ego, (iv) Superego, and (v) Id represented in a 3-Dimensional Iceberg

Figure 3.4 plainly illustrates how the conscious mind, the unconscious mind, ego, superego, and id inter-relate. The part of the iceberg that is always submerged in the ocean is representationally the id. The part of the iceberg that is close to the ocean surface, which is sometimes exposed to air and sometimes exposed to water.
depending on the tide of the ocean waves, is representationally the superego. The part of the iceberg that is mostly above the ocean surface, which is in constant contact with the world above the ocean, is representationally the ego. The ice that is in contact with the world above the ocean is representationally one’s conscious mind (which can extend to great heights), while the ice that is in contact with the oceanic world is representationally one’s unconscious mind (which can extend to great depths). The id, superego, and ego are interconnected in a structure of an iceberg that moves via floating with the waves and via size-changes. Icebergs are moveable by waves depending on their location. Additionally, icebergs enlarge or shrink in size depending on the environment of the oceanic world (e.g. when oceanic temperature becomes colder or warmer) and the environment of the world above the ocean (e.g. when cold ocean winds exert a nurturing influence on it or when scorching sunrays exert a destructive influence on it). Importantly, the dynamic movement of the iceberg in size and in position is dependent on the external and interior forces on the conscious and the unconscious. Elaboratively describing the inter-relations of the five foundational concepts in a 3-dimensional context of a solitude iceberg floating on a vast ocean is necessary to appreciate how an idiosyncratic psyche is also shaped by the historical waves, consciously and unconsciously.

Essentially, the conscious mind refers to what an individual is aware of presently. The unconscious mind refers to what an individual is unaware of presently. The preconscious mind refers to what is just beneath the surface of conscious awareness and is influenced by both conscious and unconscious factors. Within an individual’s psyche, the superego largely resides in the preconscious mind to exert a force on the
conscious mind and the unconscious mind. The ego can directly influence the unconscious mind, but the id (which is deeply rooted in the unconscious) can only influence the conscious mind when the superego does not oppose. The superego is a barrier, blocking the id from influencing the conscious mind and the superego is constantly exerting a pressurizing force on the id, which is why Freud explains jokes as the relief of suppressed desires from the id. Freud (1905/1960) substantiates this argument by explaining that jokes let out forbidden thoughts and feelings that the conscious mind usually suppresses in deference to society, such that tendentious jokes generate laughter more so than non-tendentious (i.e. non-controversial) jokes.

3.3 Illustrating the Analytical Framework

In this section, I illustrate the analytical framework with an example. Applying the seven interrogatives to an example is prudent at this stage to practically show how the analytical framework operates. To comprehensively answer how humor is used as rhetoric, the variables of Embodied Cognition [When?], Location [Where?], Producer-Consumer Relation [Who?], Semiotic Mode [Which?], Technique [What?], Target [Whom?], and Appeal [Why?] are investigated.

The example selected to illustrate the analytical framework is the toast speech orated by the Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Hsien Loong, to the (then) President of the United States, Barrack Obama, at the White House State Dinner on 2\textsuperscript{nd} August 2016. This speech was selected as an example because it is relevant and general enough for a global audience to understand. This toast speech is also parallel to what is typical of a Toastmasters’ speech in terms of speech duration and genre. Unlike the genre of a roast speech, the genre of a toast speech is generally more affiliative in its
content with an undertone of celebration and tend to involve speaking to encourage hope, idealism, good feelings.

This selected toast speech example (which can be viewed at: https://youtu.be/6NJg-OkpQWE) has a duration of 7 min 05 secs, and a transcript of this speech is attached in Appendix C. To start the humor-rhetoric analysis, I recorded every laughter instance during this speech. To be more accurate in documenting the duration of each laughter instance, I used the software Media Player Classic because it allows videos to be playback in terms of milliseconds (ms). In total, there were 9 audible laughter instances in this rhetoric analyzed. 4 of the laughter instances were less than 1000ms, 2 of the laughter instances were between 1000ms to 1999ms, and 3 of the laughter instances were at least 2000ms. In particular, one instance of laughter had a time-duration of more than 10,000ms. I will focus on this example of humor in rhetoric to analyze because it resulted in the longest duration of audience laughter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pilot.L.9</td>
<td>America is a great nation, not just because of your power and your wealth, but because of your high ideals, openness, and generosity of spirit. You seek to build a world where countries can prosper together. You make common cause with others to fight the problems which plague mankind, be it extremist terrorism, poverty, Ebola, or climate change. That is why 70 years after the Second World War,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
America is still a welcomed power in Asia. We hope these strengths and qualities will be emulated by others and will enable you to remain engaged in our region for many more years.

To mark the 50th anniversary of our relations, Singapore has named an orchid hybrid in honor of President and Mrs. Obama. And this is a hybrid of breeds native to Singapore and Hawaii, [Happy tone, with a rising pitch for the word ‘Hawaii’] (Speaker smiled quickly before looking down at his script) {Audience laughs for < 1 sec, under Pilot.L.8} where the President was born – most of us believe [Friendly tone] (Speaker smiled and held his smile) {Audience laughs for ≥ 10 secs, under Pilot.L.9}


1. **When** is humor rhetorical?

The gatekeeping criterion of *Embodied Cognition* is met when the audience spontaneously laughing for 10 seconds communicates that this moment of humor is rhetorical. Ascribing this moment of humor to be rhetorical activates further analysis of humor-rhetoric to proceed because all the next six WH-questions have a dormant assumption that there is indeed humor-rhetoric (or interchangeably: rhetorical humor) to be interrogated.

2. **Where** is the rhetorical humor taking place?
The Location where the humor-rhetoric took place was at the State Dining Room of the White House, in Washington D.C. on 2nd August 2016. The social setting where this humor-rhetoric was documented was at a black-tie banquet to celebrate the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the United States of America and Singapore. A black-tie state dinner is not a trivial occasion. State dinners signify one of the highest diplomatic honors the US government bestows to a foreign head of state. This state dinner is the 12th state dinner of the total 13 state dinners that US President Obama hosted in his 8-year presidency (20th January 2009 to 20th January 2017), and the only state dinner President Obama hosted for a Southeast Asian head of state. The physical setting of the State Dining Room in the White House measures 48 by 36 feet. The wool carpet measures 28 by 43 feet, which is decorated with wreaths and oak leaves in a field of mottled-blue. The silk window draperies are ecru in color with stripes of blue. During the video, the camera pans out three times for more physical features of the location to be observed, such as a giant golden eagle spreading its wings on the speaker’s podium, the placement of many candles for lighting, and how people are positioned in circular tables with their champagne glasses already filled for toasting. The cultural ideology embedded at this locational setting includes the environmental pressure to demonstrate decorum. Formalities of etiquette are expected at the State Dining Room of the White House, which is a posh, upscale, exclusive location for a dinner.

3. **Who** creates (& **who** perceives) the rhetorical humor?

The rhetorical humor was produced by Singapore’s Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong to a sitting audience of 200 distinguished guests, which included President Obama. Prominent political guests were US Vice-President Joe Biden, US Secretary
of State John Kerry and US Secretary of Defence Ash Carter. Celebrated American author Amy Tan, AOL Chief Executive Officer Timothy Armstrong, actress Keri Russell, actor Matthew Rhys, and American singer-songwriter Chrisette Michele were also present. The Singapore delegation included Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan, Industry Minister S. Iswaran, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office Chan Chun Sing, Acting Education Minister Ong Ye Kung, as well as Member of Parliament Christopher de Souza and Rahayu Mahzam. Singapore leaders from the military and business corporations (e.g. Singapore Airlines chairman Stephen Lee, Keppel Corporation Chief Executive Officer Loh Chin Hua and Commanding Officer of the 3rd Battalion Singapore Infantry Regiment. Lieutenant-Colonel Wong Shi Ming) were also present. The Producer-Consumer Relation includes Prime Minister Lee being an invited guest-of-honor in the home of President Obama, as well as the sitting audience also being an invited guest to the home of President Obama. At this relational setting, most of the people in the sitting audience are people with substantive governmental, or societal, influence.

4. **Which** form of humor is rhetorical? Or more specifically: Which form of semiotic play, in terms of semiotic mode(s), triggered the rhetorical humor? The **Semiotic Modes** of language, visual and audio triggered the rhetorical humor. The semiotic signifiers were the language words, “Hawaii, where the President was born - most of us believe” that was said with a friendly audio tone accompanied by the visuals of Prime Minister Lee smiling and holding his smile. The sign of laughter was denoted by the Language + Audio + Visual form of semiotic interplay.

5. **What** generates the rhetorical humor?
Employing Buijzen & Valkenburg’s (2004) taxonomy of 41 audiovisual humor techniques, I interpret that the *Technique* of absurdity was *signified* and connoted. Absurdity, as a humor technique, is defined as the demonstrating of a “situation that goes against all logical rules” (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004, p. 153). There is a logical rule and law that the US President has to be born in the US. Therefore, it is absurd that after 7 years and 8 months of being the US President, as well as being legally re-elected in 2012, there is still an ongoing allegation that the US President is not born in the US. A foreign head of state highlighting this absurdity, which is illogical by the standards of logical rules, incites the perception of humor.

6. **Whom** is the rhetorical humor jabbing?

I interpret that the audience were chiefly not laughing at a specific person or a group of people. The *Target* of the rhetorical humor is ideational. The humor-rhetoric was jabbing at the *idea*: Not everybody believes that the US President is born in the US. The belief that the President of US is not born in the US, be it true or not, is funny.

7. **Why** is humor rhetorical? Or more specifically: Why does the humor resonate, in terms of the three rhetorical appeals?

Likely, the humor-rhetoric by PM Lee did not trigger all of the 200 people in the audience to laugh spontaneously. Therefore, analyzing the *Appeal* of humor can only extend to the individuals who involuntarily laughed from the semiotic trigger “Hawaii, where the President was born - most of us believe”. As explained in subsection 3.1.7 and reiterated here, interrogating *why* the individuals who laughed laugh is deeply latent and should not be easily visible or directly observable.
Logically, in terms of humor-logos, the humor is appealing when one experiences a cognitive shift. Before the punchline was uttered, individuals were likely *not consciously thinking* (i.e. unconscious) about people’s beliefs of where President Obama was born. After PM Lee said the punchline, individuals were *immediately cognizant* (i.e. conscious) that most but not all people believe that Obama is born in the US. The content of the rhetorical humor presented by PM Lee has the potential to bring a cognitive shift, especially if mental knowledge of the persistent allegation that the US President is not born in the US is cognizable to the individual. In (cheekily) smiling and holding his smile for an extended duration, PM Lee was also (blatantly) inviting individuals in the audience to cognitively shift from a *telic* (i.e. serious) state of mind to the *paratelic* (i.e. playful) frame of mind.

Emotionally, in terms of humor-pathos, laughing at this joke brings affective pleasure which can stem from emotional relief and release. The US Presidential Election was only three months away at that time. To criticize and de-legitimatize the Obama administration, the right-wing media were still alleging in 2016 the baseless accusation that President Obama is not born in the US (Tope, Rawlinson, Pickett, Burdette, & Ellison, 2017). Fact-checked evidence (which included the cross-checking agreement in governmental documents and legal testimonies) was ignored to propagate the debate questioning Obama’s legitimacy to be the US President, especially if the idea that he is not born in the US is true. For those who felt annoyed over this matter, this joke by PM Lee has the affordance to relieve and release (personal) frustrations or (social) tensions through laughter. Socio-psychological factors underpin the emotional appeal of this humor-rhetoric.
Characterologically, in terms of humor-ethos, I argue that humor is attractive in a persuasive manner when it unconsciously enlarges a laughert's *ego*. A laughert's ego is momentarily enlarged when the rhetorical humor experienced (i) resonates with the laughert's *id*, and (ii) does not conflict with the laughert's *superego*. I interpret that the rapturous, spontaneous laughter was largely emanated by the contingent of US Democratic Party members in the audience because the humor-rhetoric appealed to enlarge their idiosyncratic ego. An individual’s ego is a mediator between the *instincts* of the id and the *values* of the superego. Individuals with allegiance towards the Democratic Party (which is Obama’s political party) are *instinctively* inclined by their unconscious *id* to resonate with this humor-rhetoric; the underlying content supports Obama’s character, authority and legitimacy as the US President. The content of the humor-rhetoric does not conflict with the ethos and credibility of the Democratic Party too. As such, political party *values* imposed on one’s *superego* do not inhibit the intra-forces of the *id* enlarging a laughert’s *ego* in an iceberg representation of the mind (please see Figures 3.3 and 3.4). On the other hand, individuals in the audience with allegiance towards the US Republican Party (which is Obama’s opposing political party) may consciously or unconsciously hold back in laughter. An involuntary outburst of boisterous laughter would impulsively suggest that ‘I’ agree (with the Democratic Party) that Obama is born in the US and ‘I’ disagree with my political party’s debate of Obama’s legitimacy as President.

**In Summary: How is Humor Used as Rhetoric in This Example?**

Humor is rhetorical *when* there is audience laughter. *Where* the rhetorical humor takes place and *who* the people involved are, situate the dynamics of humor at a locational and relational setting. The interplay of semiotic modes *which* triggers this
laughter moment is denotated by language words, expressive visuals, and audio
tonality. Absurdity is interpreted as what primarily generated this laughter moment,
while the persistent idea in the media that the President of US is not born in the US
is interpreted as the target of the laughter whom the rhetorical humor jabs at. Most
covertly, a cognitive shift bringing affective pleasure and enlarging a laughers’ ego
is argued to explain why this humor-rhetoric appeals. The seven WH-questions of
when, where, who, which, what, whom, and why are broadly guided by a socio-
psychological underpinning to inquire how humor is used as rhetoric in this
example.

**Depicting the Analytical Framework**

Investigating the seven WH-questions that resulted in the assembly of seven humor-
rhetoric variables is the key thrust directing the analysis for this study. The
analytical framework is encapsulated by Figure 3.5 depicted below. The
interrogative framework of the Humor-Rhetoric-7 is guided by a socio-
psychological underpinning. A socio-psychological underpinning simply means that
both social and psychological factors are accounted for in the interrogation of
rhetorical humor.
As explained in section 3.1, the Humor-Rhetoric-7 is a constellation of 7 interrogative factors synthesized to be most relevant to study the mechanisms of humor in rhetoric. As explained in section 3.2, the analytical approaches of social semiotics and psychodynamics regulate the socio-psychological underpinning. Social semiotics investigates the signs, signifiers, and signified in a social practice of meaning-making, whereas psychodynamics investigates the conscious mind, unconscious mind, ego, superego, and id. Therefore, both analytical approaches are useful to provide different angles to explain humor as rhetoric. Their ideological
emphasis may appear dissimilar, but both social semiotics and psychodynamics are centrally similar in acknowledging human agency and socialization. Social semiotics emphasizes the social component in how individuals interpret meaning, while psychodynamics emphasizes the idiosyncratic ego and superego being influenced by socialization to account for the peculiarities of behavior. Social semiotics and psychodynamics can synergistically underpin a socio-psychological, interrogative analysis of humor in rhetoric as illustrated with a toast speech example in this section and then encapsulated with a depiction.

Importantly, the toast speech analyzed in this section is markedly different to competitive Toastmasters’ speeches, in terms of its function (i.e. effect, purpose, objective). Toastmasters, at a competition setting, are not speaking in the capacity of a politician to dignitaries with societal influence at a black-tie banquet for the function of strengthening diplomatic relations. Competitive Toastmasters’ speeches are instead rhetoric performances that are meticulously prepared and rehearsed. Words, gestures, facial expressions, pauses, and vocal variations are strategically crafted and orchestrated for the functional goal of winning the judges’ ballot. Unlike a toast speech at a banquet setting among influential diplomats, commemorative awards for public speaking performances are available to be won. Competitive Toastmasters’ speeches and the analyzed toast speech are, however, alike in that idiosyncratic, semiotic, and sociocultural components all impact the perception of humor in rhetoric. The mechanisms (i.e. influencing causes) of how humor is perceived by the idiosyncratic members of an audience is impacted by semiotic signs of rhetoric at a sociocultural setting. Psychodynamics and social semiotics regulate the idiosyncrasies of audience laughter. The interrogative methodology
(with a socio-psychological underpinning) to closely examine the use of humor as rhetoric in 57 competitive Toastmasters’ speeches is outlined in the next Chapter. Compared to a singular toast speech example, analyzing a corpus of toast speeches is more able to reveal overarching patterns of how humor is used as rhetoric.
Chapter 4:
Methodology

There are three sections in this chapter. In section 4.1, I describe the corpus of winning Toastmasters’ speeches that this study undertakes to analyze. In section 4.2, I outline the analytical process. In section 4.3, I disclose my insider perspective of the Toastmasters community and issues related to ethics clearance.

4.1 The Corpus of Winning Toastmasters’ Speeches

Before making clear how the corpus of 57 winning Toastmasters’ speeches was selected and formed, the organization of Toastmasters International (TI®) is briefly described because not all readers may know of TI®.

Background Information of Toastmasters International (TI®)

Toastmasters International (TI®) is a non-profit educational organization that presently operates in 143 countries with the mission of helping members improve their communication, public-speaking, and leadership skills ("Welcome to Toastmasters International", 2018). Since 1924, TI® has been a structured institution, serving to train its members to be effective leaders and communicators. As at 30 June 2018, there are 16,644 active member clubs worldwide.

These 16,644 clubs are organized into 14 Regions which are divided into 98 Districts ("Toastmasters International Dashboard", 2018). All 98 Districts in Toastmasters are sub-divided into Divisions and Areas. Regions, Districts, Divisions, and Areas are grouped, based on its geographical proximity, to facilitate favorable community
support within a close-knit network (Toastmasters District Management, 2018).

Every Region has an average of seven Districts and each District contains at least five Divisions. For every Division, there must be at least three Areas and for every Area, there are at least four to six Toastmasters Clubs (Toastmasters District Management, 2018).

According to the August 2017 CEO Report issued by the Headquarters of Toastmasters International, member demographics at Toastmasters are characterized by gender balance (51.5% female), higher education (76.8% hold at least a Bachelor’s degree), high earners (26.7% have an annual income of at least USD$100,000, with 41.1% earning more than USD75,000 per year) and a mature participation (21.8% are within ages 45 to 54 and 31.6% are at least age 55). Global positioning and annual membership numbers are also expanding with an upward trajectory. Membership has grown consecutively every year since 1993 (Toastmasters CEO Report, 2017).

At the societal level, it is “the demand in the marketplace for strong leaders and speakers” that perpetuates the growth figures for Toastmasters International (“Toastmasters Mediacenter”, 2014). At the ground level, it is the encouraging and constructive environment to nurture public-speaking experiences which appeals to members. Although there are increasingly more captivating alternatives for people to engage their time in, Toastmasters International is able to retain its relevance and appeal because it is a supportive community for members to experientially do public-speaking regularly. The arts of speaking, listening, and thinking are actively trained through weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly Toastmasters Club meetings.
The World Championship of Public Speaking® (WCPS)®

The World Championship of Public Speaking® (WCPS)® is the grand, hallmark event for Toastmasters, which is organized and regulated by Toastmasters International (TI®) every year. Being marketed as the largest public speaking competition globally, the annual WCPS® attracts media attention and affiliates thousands of Toastmasters from different Regions, Districts, Divisions, Areas, and Clubs to come together. To be the representative of a District and present a speech at the WCPS®, a Toastmasters member is required to win at five consecutive levels of Toastmasters speech contest within the same year prior, that is (i) the Club level, (ii) the Area level, (iii) the Division level, (iv) the District level, and (v) the Inter-District Semifinals. At least 30,000 Toastmasters compete every year to qualify for the WCPS® (“Toastmasters Mediacenter”, 2018). However, only nine or ten Toastmasters win at five consecutive levels of speech contest each year to qualify for the Inter-District Finals (i.e. the WCPS®). Competitors who reach the Finals and qualify for the WCPS® are mostly seasoned speakers consisting of lawyers, pastors, motivational speakers, teachers and speech coaches. Being accoladed as the “World Champion of Public Speaking” can enrich professional credibility for one’s career. Given the rigor in competition to qualify and considering what is representationally at stake, high levels of competency and skills in public speaking are on display at the WCPS® each year.

To determine the overall 1st place winner at the WCPS®, 14 anonymous judges from the 14 different Regions are randomly seated among the audience each year to score and rank each WCPS® speech. The WCPS® speech with the highest cumulative
ranking points, as assessed by the 14 anonymous judges, will win 1st place. The scoring rubric to determine the winning speech is standardized to be based on speech development (20 marks), content effectiveness (15 marks), speech value (15 marks), delivery (30 marks), and language (20 marks). Details of the judging criteria are provided in Appendix D (and at: bit.ly/ntuphd_AppendixD). Importantly, using humor, or making the audience laugh, is not explicitly required as a judging criterion in the scoring rubric. It is technically possible to be the overall 1st place winner at the WCPS®, without using humor or making the audience laugh. At a rhetoric setting whereby humor and laughter is not absolutely compulsory, will humor and laughter still transpire?

Starting from 2012, all WCPS® speeches are publicly available for immediate viewing online upon purchase at http://www.toastmastersondemand.com. Pre-2012 WCPS® speeches are not readily accessible to the public because the copyright for these speeches is registered to a business company - Bill Stephens Productions, Inc - that privatizes and monetizes the pre-2012 WCPS® speeches in terms of physical DVD commodities. Therefore, only WCPS® speeches from 2012 onwards were selected to be analyzed. In total, 57 WCPS® speeches formed the corpus for this study because there were nine finalists in the WCPS® from 2012 to 2014 and ten finalists in the WCPS® from 2015 to 2017. I selected these 57 WCPS® speeches because they are publicly accessible and represent the best exemplification of rhetoric by Toastmasters formed over a period of 6 years.

4.2 Analytical Process

The analytical process to investigate how humor is used as rhetoric in the 57
winning Toastmasters’ speeches is directed by the scrutiny of seven humor-rhetoric variables: Embodied Cognition [When?], Location [Where?], Producer-Consumer Relation [Who?], Semiotic Mode [Which?], Technique [What?], Target [Whom?], and Appeal [Why?]. Because WH-questions demand specificity, there is an underlying ‘how’ that is being asked in each WH-question.

Analyzing the Embodied Cognition of Rhetorical Humor

To account for how the variable of Embodied Cognition operates as a criterion for the indication of rhetorical humor, I inquired: “When is humor rhetorical? How so?”

For this study, the variable of embodied cognition is operationalized by audience laughter. Audience laughter is the only embodied cognition of humor in rhetoric available to a researcher, given the nature of the dataset videos. All 57 videos of the corpus had the camera lens pointed only towards the stage. Hence, an independent viewer cannot see the facial expressions of the audience during all 57 dataset speeches and can only hear the collective sounds by the audience, such as groans, applause, and laughter. Laughter is specified, in this study, as embodied representations of humor that has socio-communicative functions. Presence (and absence) of audience laughter is rhetoric in communicating at social settings. Laughter sounds by the audience are reflective of embodied accounts of cognition that can be contextualized as a socio-communicative criterion to operationalize when is humor rhetorical. Therefore, to initiate the investigation of humor as rhetoric, every audible laughter sound by the audience is measured in terms of its occurrence and duration.

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1 Please see sub-section 1.2.2 - “Defining and Specifying the Behavior of Laughter” - for the details.
2 Please see sub-section 3.1.1 - "Embodied Cognition [When]" - for the details.
To be methodologically rigorous, Media Player Classic is used to playback all dataset speeches of the corpus because Media Player Classic has the software capability to smoothly display how time progresses in terms of milliseconds. Every occurrence of audience laughter, arising from a speaker’s humor, is measured in terms of milliseconds (ms) and then coded into one of three categories: (i) “audible laughter of less than 1000ms”, (ii) “audible laughter between 1000ms and 1999ms”, and (iii) “audible laughter of at least 2000ms”. This methodological decision to translate every laughter instance into these three categories of laughter duration meant that laughter duration is no longer a (continuous) ratio variable but a (continuous) interval variable. Doing so accounts for the human measurement error variance adequately and improves the reliability and validity of the study. [Please note that if a researcher chooses to categorize laughter duration into only two categories of “audible laughter of at least 2000ms” and “no audible laughter of at least 2000ms”, laughter duration will now be a (dichotomous) ordinal variable which disallows many inferential test-statistics to be administered.]

It is relevant to note that human measurement error of laughter duration is inherent in the methodology of this study. The 720p HD quality video in all the WCPS® speeches has an output of 24 frames per second. This translates to 1 frame per 0.042s. Hence, there is no way it can be certain that any frame paused at during a 720p HD video is at the true 0.001s. For every moment paused during a WCPS® video to record laughter points, there is an error uncertainty of ± 0.042s. There is also fluctuating white noise in every WCPS® video that cannot be acoustically removed. Even if a coder is fully attentive and puts on in-ear earpieces to enhance
audio details, to determine the precise frame that audible laughter starts-and-ends will have a degree of uncertainty.

To adequately account for this human measurement error variance (i.e. a minimum of $\pm 0.042s \times 2$), every laughter instance is first measured in terms of ms, and then coded into one of three categories: (i) “audible laughter of less than 1000ms”, (ii) “audible laughter between 1000ms and 1999ms”, and (iii) “audible laughter of at least 2000ms”. This two-step procedure is necessary to improve the reliability of the reported laughter duration results. If different people are to code this same dataset for the same operational measure of laughter duration, the coded results will likely be in higher agreement. The final range of possibilities to code laughter instances is not boundless but restricted to four levels of interval: Level 0 - No laughter; Level 1 - Audience laughed less than 1 second; Level 2 - Audience laughed between 1 and 2 seconds; Level 3 - Audience laughed for 2 seconds or more.

To ensure that the validity of humor-rhetoric is robust, only the highest interval level of audience laughter (i.e. Level 3 - Audience laughed for at least 2 seconds) is regarded as a humor-rhetoric to be analyzed in this study. Specifying “audible laughter of at least 2000ms” to be the criterion of when a humor is rhetorical secures the construct of humor-rhetoric to be adequately valid. Two requisites must be met in order for “audible laughter of at least 2000ms” to be recorded. First, the humor presented must be sufficiently humorous such that the laughter does not naturally die down within 2000ms. Second, the speaker had to stop speaking for the coder to hear “audible laughter of at least 2000ms”. The validity of humor-rhetoric is improved when the criterion of a humor-rhetoric is both stringent and pertinent to what a
humor-rhetoric is. To require an audience to laugh for at least 2000ms naturally is stringent; to analyze only a rhetoric whereby the speaker mindfully paused for the humor effect to manifest is pertinent. For prolonged audience laughter of 2 seconds and beyond to be recorded, the rhetoric must not only be substantially humorous, the speaker must also craft this humor-rhetoric by deliberately pausing. A stringent and pertinent criterion of humor-rhetoric is necessary to improve the accuracy of the study because it has a trickle-down effect on the validity of all the other six humor-rhetoric variables analyzed.

In this study, every manifestation of audience laughter is regarded as an embodied cognition of humor in rhetoric. However, only laughter that organically sustains for at least 2000ms meets the criterion of rhetorical humor to be regarded as a sign of humor as rhetoric in this study. The sign of rhetorical humor is thereafter analyzed in terms of its physical signifiers (i.e. the literal, obvious, objective components) and its concepts signified (i.e. the ideational, mental, subjective components).

Apart from documenting embodied laughter in terms of its occurrence and duration, laughter is also investigated in terms of its distribution across time. To chart how laughter emits while a speech progresses, every audible laughter instance by the audience during each WCPS® Speech is coded into one of eight time-period labels: (i) 0ms to 1st minute, (ii) 1st to 2nd minute, (iii) 2nd to 3rd minute, (iv) 3rd to 4th minute, (v) 4th to 5th minute, (vi) 5th to 6th minute, (vii) 6th to 7th minute, and (viii) 7th minute.
onwards. How laughter instances\(^1\) and laughter moments\(^2\) vary across the minute-intervals of a speech are then tabulated and depicted in histograms. By analyzing their (i) occurrence, (ii) duration, and (iii) distribution across time, a comprehensive inquiry of how laughter manifested during the 57 winning Toastmasters’ speeches is initiated.

Analyzing the Location of Rhetorical Humor

To investigate how the variable of Location is an influencing cause (i.e. mechanism) of rhetorical humor, I inquired: “Where did the rhetorical humor take place? How did the locational setting impact rhetorical humor?”

To analyze the variable of location, the locational setting where the rhetorical humor is situated is examined in terms of its (i) physical setting, (ii) social environment, and (iii) cultural backdrop. How the physical setting and sociocultural setting impacted how rhetorical humor manifested are explicated.

Analyzing the Producer-Consumer Relation of Rhetorical Humor

To investigate how the variable of the Producer-Consumer Relation is an influencing cause (i.e. mechanism) of rhetorical humor, I inquired: “Who were the people producing and consuming the rhetorical humor? How did their relational dynamic impact rhetorical humor?”

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\(^1\) Laughter instances refer to spontaneous audience laughter that is audible.

\(^2\) Laughter moments refer to spontaneous audience laughter that is audible for at least 2000ms. Therefore, laughter moments are a subset of laughter instances.
To analyze the producer-consumer relation, I scrutinized (i) who produced the rhetorical humor, (ii) who consumed the rhetorical humor, and (iii) their relational dynamic. How the relational setting impacted how rhetorical humor manifested is explicated.

Analyzing the Semiotic Mode(s) of Rhetorical Humor

To inquire how the variable of semiotics is an influencing cause (i.e. mechanism) of rhetorical humor, I investigated: “Which form of semiotic play, in terms of Semiotic Mode(s), triggered the rhetorical humor? How so did the play in meaning-making signifiers denote rhetorical humor?”

In this study, three modes of semiotic signifiers are studied: (i) Language mode, (ii) Visual mode, and (iii) Audio mode. The Language semiotic mode refers to the signifiers/ stimulus of literal, English words. The Visual semiotic mode refers to the signifiers/ stimulus of what is seen, such as facial expressions and dynamic gestures communicated by the speaker. The Audio semiotic mode pertains to the signifiers/ stimulus of what is heard in terms of non-word sounds (e.g. concocted sound effects) and vocal variations (e.g. changes in tone, pitch, volume). As such, as typified in Table 3.4 in the previous chapter, there are at least seven forms of semiotic play that trigger the embodied cognition of humor: (i) Language play, (ii) Visual play, (iii) Audio play, (iv) Language + Visual interplay, (v) Language + Audio interplay, (vi) Visual + Audio interplay, and (vii) Language + Visual + Audio interplay. To explicate how the play in meaning-making signifiers stimulated rhetorical humor, only humor-rhetoric moments that measured at least 2000ms of audience laughter are scrutinized in terms of the preceding semiotics that denoted it. By investigating
which semiotic mode(s) triggered rhetorical humor, how the play in semiotics stimulated rhetorical humor is documented.

Analyzing the Technique of Rhetorical Humor

To interpret how the mechanism of Technique triggers rhetorical humor, I inquired: “What technique most strikingly generated the rhetorical humor? How so?”

To probe into the techniques of rhetorical humor, Buijzen and Valkenburg’s (2004) taxonomy of 41 audiovisual humor techniques is employed. Interpreting what technique most strikingly generated each humor-rhetoric is based on the definition (with examples) that Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004) provided to particularize each of their 41 humor techniques. As explained in sub-section 3.1.5, Buijzen and Valkenburg’s (2004) framework is selected because it is empirically robust in its formulation and is presently the most appropriate taxonomy (utilizing both breadth and meaningful specificity) to typify the strategic tactics in public-speaking humor.

How rhetorical humor is generated by different communicate means (e.g. exaggeration, irony, satire, puns) is examined closely. How prevalent all 41 humor techniques were in distinctly inciting rhetorical humor is catalogued in a frequency table, arranged in descendance according to its occurrence count. How differential techniques, most strikingly, provoked laughter moments are explicated with examples. Additionally, although the variable of technique distinctly generated laughter, three themes across all techniques were observed to commonly generate laughter and are reported.

Analyzing the Target of Rhetorical Humor
To interpret how the mechanism of Target triggers rhetorical humor, I inquired:

“Whom did the rhetorical humor, most strikingly, target? How so did laughter arise from jabs at people, groups, or ideas?”

Investigating the variable of Target draws from the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) that pronounces identifying the “butt of the joke” or the “subject of ridicule” as an important parameter for the analysis of jokes. However, the GTVH which positions itself to analyze verbal humor (i.e. written joke text, rather than oral joke performance) regards that the Target of jokes is *always* human; non-human must not be labeled as a Target of jokes (Attardo, 1994, 2001, 2017). The academic research on laughter has a different stance when laughter is regarded to mock¹ at “people, groups, and concepts” (Gruner, 2017, p. 75-106). Because of the debate in the academic literature, I analyzed with attentiveness: Whom (be it human or non-human) did the rhetorical humor most strikingly poke fun at for there to be laughter? Whether jokes, in oral joke performance, are people-targeted or non-people targeted is scrutinized for the results to speak. Analyzing whom each rhetorical humor targets is critical because it uncovers the specific subject (or matter) being laughed about. 

*How* laughter is triggered by the variable of *whom* the rhetorical humor targets is explicated with examples.

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¹ Please see segment 1.2.1.3 - "Laughter as Communication" - for the details
Each time laughter spontaneously erupts for a sustained duration of at least 2000ms, it cannot be assumed that the rhetorical humor appealed to resonate with all members of an audience. As such, analyzing why rhetorical humor is attractive in a persuasive manner to compel the reaction of laughter can only extend to the individuals in an audience who instinctively experienced the rhetorical humor in an embodied manner. As detailed in sub-section 3.1.7, why humor-rhetoric compels in terms of (i) humor-logos, (ii) humor-pathos, and (iii) humor-ethos cannot be fully addressed by examining the social semiotic content alone; why individuals who laughed laugh is largely governed by idiosyncratic variance (such as personal knowledge and understanding, psychological state of mind, dispositional attitudes).

To inquire how the mechanism of one’s psyche triggers the experience of rhetorical humor, the dynamics of the conscious mind, unconscious mind, ego, superego, and id are examined. Socialized influences (such as cultural norms regarding civic virtues and vices) are also taken into account in the socio-psychological inquiry. Explorative explanations to most plausibly explain the logical appeal, emotional appeal, and character appeal of laughter from the perspective of an audience are provided.

**Improving the Interpretation of Results**

audience laugh? Importantly, in the 57 winning Toastmasters’ speeches analyzed, the sitting audiences are dissimilar as they spanned across six different years. Because I do not have access to the actual WCPS® audience be it for 2012 or for 2017, the analysis of ‘how’ an audience laugh is based on the perspective of an online audience interpreting the online videos. Observing the inquired ‘when’, ‘where’, ‘who’, and ‘which’ of laughter are largely overt to an online audience viewing the 57 speech videos. Perceiving the inquired ‘what’, ‘whom’, and ‘why’ of laughter are however covert to any audience, be it online or actual. The ‘what’, ‘whom’, and ‘why’ inquired in this study required interpretation.

To improve the interpretations of ‘what’ technique generated rhetorical humor, ‘whom’ did rhetorical humor target and ‘why’ did rhetorical humor appeal, I consulted with two coders\(^1\) after I had collated all of the humor-rhetoric moments in the 57 speech videos. As will be reported in section 5.1, 26.7% of all the humor-rhetoric moments recorded were concentrated in 6 of the WCPS® speeches. The two coders and I independently interpreted the inquired ‘what’, ‘whom’, and ‘why’ questions for these humor-rhetoric moments. We met on 6 different days to progressively discuss the moments of rhetorical humor in the 6 different WCPS® speeches. We collectively agreed on the inferential results with a 3 out of 3 agreement, or a 2 out of 3 agreement, for ‘what’ technique generated each humor-rhetoric, ‘whom’ did each humor-rhetoric target, and ‘why’ did each humor-rhetoric appeal in terms of humor-logos, humor-pathos, and humor-ethos. Thereafter, I proceeded to code and analyze the remaining 73.3% of humor-rhetoric moments for

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\(^1\) The two coders comprised one female rater, who was a Toastmasters member from 2012 to 2016, and one male rater, who was a Toastmasters member from 2008 to 2016.
their covert mechanisms of Technique, Target, and Appeal by myself.

However, because I did not formally interview any WCPS® speaker or audience member at the WCPS® for their personal point of view to be factored into the study for analysis, the interpretative findings made, based on deductive and inductive reasoning, can be deemed as conjectural by scientific standards. I acknowledge that the interpretative findings in this study have subjective features and will substantiate with objective, verifiable, empirical data when key arguments are made.

4.3 Ethics Disclosure

No ethics clearance was required by the university Institutional Review Board to undertake this study as no human subjects was directly involved in the study. All 57 winning Toastmasters’ speeches are publicly accessible upon purchase at http://www.toastmastersondemand.com/. Many of the winning Toastmasters’ speeches analyzed are also easily available to be viewed on popular video-sharing websites, such as YouTube, Vimeo, Facebook. No formal interviews were conducted, and no private or confidential information was collected from any human participant. What is researched on is solely the content of the publicly available speeches. Results and interpretations discussed are limited to only what is perceptible from the recorded videos as I have never attended the WCPS® (World Championship of Public Speaking®) in person before.

I disclose that I am a registered Toastmasters member since 2010 for an insider perspective of humor at this community setting. However, I do not have any remunerative conflict of interest for doing research into Toastmasters’ speeches.
have never been paid any administrative funds by Toastmasters International (TI®) or been a director, executive, or key appointment holder for TI®. Being an ordinary member of the TI® community is beneficial to this study when I have ground experiences of its rhetoric practices and access to insider views. However, being a member of TI® can be disadvantageous when I cannot see certain aspects of laughter that a non-Toastmaster may perceive of the humor as rhetoric in Toastmasters’ speeches. For example, it may be more perceptible to people not involved with Toastmasters to note that Toastmaster speakers fawn over the audience more, compared to other speakers speaking at other public-speaking settings.

As such, the analytical process included discussions with non-Toastmasters on how Technique, Target, and Appeal trigger laughter in the dataset videos. To have had informally discussed laughter, rhetoric, and humor with a mix of at least a hundred Toastmasters and non-Toastmasters were crucial in showing me the possibilities and themes of what can be signified from the sign of laughter. For example, a South African comedic practitioner pointed out to me that, contrary to what theories in academia assert, verbal humor Target ideas (e.g. nationalism); the Appeal of laughter is also incited by not-feeling rather than feeling, knowing rather than thinking, and trusting rather than believing. Concerning the ethics of citing the source of information, I disclose that ‘my’ exploratory analysis of what is explicit and implicit in laughter does not all originate from me but stems from the analyses of many others who are often not credited by name. Synthesizing the original analyses and views of others into this research report is nevertheless fully written by me that I take responsibility for.
Chapter 5:
Results and Interpretations

This chapter provides the results and interpretations aimed at addressing the overarching research question: “How is humor used as rhetoric in the winning Toastmasters’ speeches?” The key thrust directing the analysis is the seven interrogative WH-questions. The (i) ‘when?’, (ii) ‘where?’, (iii) ‘who?’, (iv) ‘which?’, (v) ‘what?’, (vi) ‘whom?’, and (vii) ‘why?’ of rhetorical humor are investigated, in this sequence in sections 5.1 to 5.7, to comprehensively account for how humor is used as rhetoric in the 57 winning Toastmasters’ speeches.

5.1 Analyzing Embodied Cognition [When?]

The analysis in this section is directed by the inquiry: “When, as expressed by Embodied Cognition, is humor rhetorical? How so?” In this study, every manifestation of audience laughter is regarded as an embodied cognition of humor in rhetoric. Humor as rhetoric, which is a subset of humor in rhetoric, is regarded to be evident when the manifestation of audience laughter is at least 2000ms.

Analyzing Laughter in terms of Time-Duration:

Every audible laughter transmitted by the sitting audience during the 57 WCPS® speeches was measured and reported. There were 873 audible instances of laughter that manifested during the 57 WCPS® speeches (T = 401 mins 28 secs). This translated to an average of 15.3 audible instances of laughter in each WCPS® speech (\(\bar{t} = 7 \text{ mins 3 secs}\)). During the World Championship of Public Speaking® from 2012
to 2017, there was an average of one unique laughter instance for every 27.6 seconds of speech time.

Of the 873 unique laughter instances (see Table 5.1): 306 laughter instances recorded a laughter duration of less than 1000ms, 305 laughter instances recorded a laughter duration between 1000ms and 1999ms, and 262 laughter instances recorded a laughter duration of at least 2000ms.

Table 5.1: Laughter Recorded, in terms of Time-Duration, at the WCPS® from 2012 to 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Laughter Instances</th>
<th>Laughter Duration</th>
<th>Laughter Duration</th>
<th>Laughter Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; 1 sec</td>
<td>≥ 1 sec, &lt; 2 sec</td>
<td>≥ 2 secs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 WCPS® Speeches</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 WCPS® Speeches</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 WCPS® Speeches</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 WCPS® Speeches</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 WCPS® Speeches</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017 WCPS® Speeches</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Laughter</strong></td>
<td><strong>873</strong></td>
<td><strong>306</strong></td>
<td><strong>305</strong></td>
<td><strong>262</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Laughter/</strong></td>
<td><strong>15.3</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.6</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCPS® Speech</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analyzing Laughter Instances in terms of their Manifestation Across Time:

All 873 unique laughter instances were tabulated in a frequency against time-period histogram (see Figure 5.1). There were **142** laughter instances in the 0ms to 1st minute time-period, **139** laughter instances in the 1st to 2nd minute time-period, **172** laughter instances in the 2nd to 3rd minute time-period, **143** laughter instances in the
3rd to 4th minute time-period, 117 laughter instances in the 4th to 5th minute time-period, 97 laughter instances in the 5th to 6th minute time-period, 57 laughter instances in the 6th to 7th minute time-period, and 6 laughter instances in the 7th minute onwards time-period.

Figure 5.1: Frequency of all Laughter Instances against Time-Period Histogram

To examine if there was any significant difference in laughter instances among the time-periods, a Chi-square ($\chi^2$) Test for Goodness-of-Fit was administered in IBM SPSS 24. The results indicated that the laughter instances were not equally distributed across the time-periods, $\chi^2 (5, N = 810) = 24.19, p < .001$. With reference to the observed frequency, expected frequency, and residual frequency tabulated (please see Table 5.2), it is concluded that there were significantly more laughter instances in the 2nd to 3rd minute time-period and significantly fewer laughter instances in the 5th to 6th minute time-period, relative to the other minute-periods. In
other words, the Toastmasters audience laughed most often during the 2\textsuperscript{nd} to 3\textsuperscript{rd} minute of a WCPS\textsuperscript{®} speech and laughed less frequently during the 5\textsuperscript{th} to 6\textsuperscript{th} minute of a WCPS\textsuperscript{®} speech.

Table 5.2: Observed Frequency of Laughter Instances, Expected Frequency of Laughter Instances, and Residual Frequency of Laughter Instances for Chi-square ($\chi^2$) Goodness-of-Fit Test among Time-Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time-Period</th>
<th>Observed Frequency</th>
<th>Expected Frequency</th>
<th>Residual Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0ms to 1\textsuperscript{st} minute</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>135.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1\textsuperscript{st} to 2\textsuperscript{nd} minute</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>135.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd} to 3\textsuperscript{rd} minute</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>135.0</td>
<td>37.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3\textsuperscript{rd} to 4\textsuperscript{th} minute</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>135.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4\textsuperscript{th} to 5\textsuperscript{th} minute</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>135.0</td>
<td>-18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5\textsuperscript{th} to 6\textsuperscript{th} minute</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>135.0</td>
<td>-38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Frequency</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>810.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that: The 57 laughter instances in the 6\textsuperscript{th} to 7\textsuperscript{th} minute time-period, and the 6 laughter instances in the 7\textsuperscript{th} minute onwards time-period were excluded for the Chi-square ($\chi^2$) Test.

In the aforementioned Chi-square ($\chi^2$) analysis, only six time-periods (i.e. 0ms to 1\textsuperscript{st} minute, 1\textsuperscript{st} to 2\textsuperscript{nd} minute, 2\textsuperscript{nd} to 3\textsuperscript{rd} minute, 3\textsuperscript{rd} to 4\textsuperscript{th} minute, 4\textsuperscript{th} to 5\textsuperscript{th} minute, 5\textsuperscript{th} to 6\textsuperscript{th} minute) were compared and contrasted. The ‘6\textsuperscript{th} to 7\textsuperscript{th} minute’ time-period and the ‘7\textsuperscript{th} minute onwards’ time-period were excluded for the Chi-square ($\chi^2$) Test. This is because to analyze the frequency of audience’s laughter beyond the 6\textsuperscript{th} minute mark is not justifiable for this dataset of speeches, which comprises varying
speech duration from 6 minutes 0 seconds (the shortest recorded WCPS® speech) to 7 minutes 42 seconds (the longest recorded WCPS® speech).

Analyzing Laughter Moments in terms of their Manifestation Across Time:
As much as there were 873 instances of embodied laughter in the 57 WCPS® speeches analyzed, only laughter that was sustained for at least 2000ms meets the criterion of a humor-as-rhetoric moment defined in this study. As reported in Table 5.1, there were 262 unique moments that elicited audible audience laughter of at least 2000ms. Given that the total speech time of the 57 WCPS® speeches was 401 minutes and 28 seconds, this converted to an average of one humor-rhetoric moment for every 91.2 seconds of speech time in the World Championship of Public Speaking® from 2012 to 2017. There was an average of 4.6 humor-rhetoric moments in each WCPS® speech ($\bar{t} = 7 \text{ mins } 3 \text{ secs}$).

Similar with the variable of laughter instances, all 262 humor-rhetoric moments were tabulated in a frequency against time-period histogram (see Figure 5.2). There were 33 humor-rhetoric moments in the 0ms to 1st minute time-period, 35 humor-rhetoric moments in the 1st to 2nd minute time-period, 52 humor-rhetoric moments in the 2nd to 3rd minute time-period, 44 humor-rhetoric moments in the 3rd to 4th minute time-period, 39 humor-rhetoric moments in the 4th to 5th minute time-period, 36 humor-rhetoric moments in the 5th to 6th minute time-period, 22 humor-rhetoric moments in the 6th to 7th minute time-period, and 1 humor-rhetoric moment in the 7th minute onwards time-period. Similar to the pattern of laughter instances recorded against time-period in Figure 5.1, the 2nd to 3rd minute time-period has the highest frequency of humor-rhetoric moments.
To examine if there was any significant difference in humor-rhetoric moments among the time-periods, a Chi-square ($\chi^2$) Test for Goodness-of-Fit was administered, $\chi^2 (5, N = 239) = 6.23, p = .28$. The results indicated no significant evidence ($p > .05$) that the humor-rhetoric moments were unequally distributed among the six time-period analyzed (see Table 5.3). Although the 2nd to 3rd minute time-period had the highest frequency of humor-rhetoric moments, this higher frequency was not significantly unequal to the other minute-periods, $p > .05$. The Toastmasters audience did not experience humor-rhetoric moments unequally among the six one-minute-periods analyzed.
Table 5.3: Observed Frequency of Humor-Rhetoric Moments, Expected Frequency of Humor-Rhetoric Moments, and Residual Frequency of Humor-Rhetoric Moments for Chi-square ($\chi^2$) Goodness-of-Fit Test among Time-Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time-Period</th>
<th>Observed Frequency</th>
<th>Expected Frequency</th>
<th>Residual Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0ms to 1st minute</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>-6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st to 2nd minute</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>-4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd to 3rd minute</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd to 4th minute</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th to 5th minute</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>-0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th to 6th minute</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>-3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Frequency</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>239.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that: The 22 humor-rhetoric moments during the 6th to 7th minute time-period, and the 1 humor-rhetoric moment during the 7th minute onwards time-period were excluded for the Chi-square ($\chi^2$) Test.

In the aforementioned Chi-square ($\chi^2$) analysis of humor-rhetoric moments, only six time-periods (i.e. 0ms to 1st minute, 1st to 2nd minute, 2nd to 3rd minute, 3rd to 4th minute, 4th to 5th minute, 5th to 6th minute) were compared and contrasted. Likewise to the Chi-square ($\chi^2$) analysis of laughter instances, the two time-periods of ‘6th to 7th minute’ and ‘7th minute onwards’ were excluded. This is because all WCPS® speeches were at least 6 minutes 0 seconds long but not all WCPS® speeches had a speech duration of at least 7 minutes. Among the 57 WCPS® speeches, 21 WCPS® speeches had a speech duration between 6 minutes 0 seconds to 6 minutes 59 seconds, and 36 WCPS® speeches had a speech duration between 7 minutes 0 seconds to 7 minutes 42 seconds. Due to the variations in the duration of the WCPS®
speeches, expected frequency of laughter instances and humor-rhetoric moments in the time-period of ‘6th to 7th minute’ and ‘7th minute onwards’ cannot be justifiably tabulated for both Tables 5.2 and 5.3 respectively. Therefore, I excluded all audience’s laughter beyond the 6th minute mark in the Chi-square ($\chi^2$) frequency analysis of laughter instances and humor-rhetoric moments.

Analyzing the Percentage of Laughter Instances being Humor-Rhetoric Moments

When the frequency of laughter instances and the frequency of humor-rhetoric moments were combined and compared against time-period in Table 5.4, an unforeseen phenomenon emerged.

Table 5.4: Frequency of All Laughter Instances recorded, Frequency of Laughter Moments recorded, and Percentage of Laughter Instances that are Laughter Moments Against Time-Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time-Period</th>
<th>Frequency of Laughter Instances Recorded</th>
<th>Frequency of Humor-Rhetoric Moments Recorded</th>
<th>Percentage of Laughter Instances that are Humor-Rhetoric Moments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0ms to 1st minute</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st to 2nd minute</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd to 3rd minute</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd to 4th minute</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th to 5th minute</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th to 6th minute</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th to 7th minute</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th minute onwards</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Frequency</td>
<td>873</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that: Any comparative interpretations made of the two time-periods of ‘6th to 7th minute’ and ‘7th minute onwards’ relative to the other minute-periods are not justifiably valid because the duration of
the 57 WCPS® speeches fluctuated randomly between 6 minutes 0 seconds (the shortest recorded WCPS® speech) and 7 minutes 42 seconds (the longest recorded WCPS® speech).

As shown in Table 5.4, the percentage of laughter instances being humor-rhetoric moments increased upwardly at every increase in minute-interval. When the Spearman’s nonparametric test for correlation was administered, the correlation between ‘percentage of laughter instances that are humor-rhetoric moments’ and ‘minute-interval’ is significant, $r_s(6) = +1.00, p < .001$. For the 6 minute-intervals analyzed, every increase in ‘minute-interval’ correlated to a robust increase in percentage of laughter instances being humor-rhetoric moments. The time-period of ‘6th to 7th minute’ and ‘7th minute onwards’ were excluded from the minute-interval analysis because the duration of the 57 WCPS® speeches fluctuated randomly between 6 minutes 0 seconds (the shortest recorded WCPS® speech) and 7 minutes 42 seconds (the longest recorded WCPS® speech). Nevertheless, it is valid to make comparative interpretations among the 6 minute-intervals of ‘0ms to 1st minute’, ‘1st to 2nd minute’, ‘2nd to 3rd minute’, ‘3rd to 4th minute’, ‘4th to 5th minute’, ‘5th to 6th minute’ because all 57 WCPS® speeches were at least 6 minutes 0 seconds.

With every minute-interval increase in time, the occurrence of laughter elicited being intensely-sustained for at least 2 seconds increased. The longer that a speaker spoke, the more likely that laughter by the audience was a humor-rhetoric moment of at least 2000ms. In the first minute of all 57 WCPS® speeches, 23.2% of the 142 laughter instances recorded were laughter moments of at least 2 seconds. With every minute interval that passed, the percentage of laughter instances being laughter moments increased consecutively from 25.2% to 30.2% to 30.8% to 33.3%. In the
minute-interval of the 5th to 6th minute for all 57 WCPS® speeches, 37.1% of the 97 laughter instances recorded were humor-rhetoric moments (i.e. laughter instances of at least 2 seconds).

How the Humor-Rhetoric Moments Varied among the 57 WCPS® Speeches

As much as there was an average of 4.60 humor-rhetoric moments in each WCPS® speech (see Table 5.1), humor-rhetoric moments did not manifest equally among the 57 WCPS® speeches. To show how the 57 WCPS® speeches varied in terms of the number of humor-rhetoric moments in each WCPS® speech, a bar graph with a projection trendline was computed with SPSS 24 (see Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3: Bar Graph (with a projection trendline) to show how the Number of Humor-Rhetoric Moments Varied Among the 57 WCPS® Speeches

Among the 57 WCPS® speeches, 5 speeches had no humor-rhetoric moments. 21 speeches had 1, or 2, or 3 humor-rhetoric moments. 25 speeches had at least 4 to 9 humor-rhetoric moments. 6 speeches had at least 11 humor-rhetoric moments. The
trendline produced by SPSS 24 in Figure 5.3 resembled a positively skewed normal distribution. By observing how the number of humor-rhetoric moments were distributed across the 57 WCPS® speeches, a pie chart was tabulated according to percentile-categorizations that are noticeably meaningful. Figure 5.4 shows the pie chart of how the frequency of humor-rhetoric moments varied, by classification of the bottom 10-percentile, the 11 to 45 percentile, the 46 to 90 percentile, and the top 10-percentile in this 57 WCPS® speeches dataset.

Figure 5.4: Pie Chart to show how the Number of Humor-Rhetoric Moments Varied Among the 57 WCPS® Speeches

The Variation of Humor-Rhetoric Moments among the 57 WCPS® Speeches

- Frequency of WCPS® speeches with no humor-rhetoric moments (≈ Bottom 10 percentile)
- Frequency of WCPS® speeches with 1, or 2, or 3 humor-rhetoric moments (≈ 11 to 45 percentile)
- Frequency of WCPS® speeches with 4 to 10 humor-rhetoric moments (≈ 46 to 90 percentile)
- Frequency of WCPS® speeches with at least 11 humor-rhetoric moments (≈ Top 10 percentile)

The bottom 10-percentile (n = 5) of WCPS® speeches in this dataset, solely in terms of humor-rhetoric moments, had no laughter duration recorded that was ≥ 2 seconds. Although there were no humor-rhetoric moments, there was still audience laughter recorded in these speeches. Table 5.5 breaks down the laughter instances recorded in these 5 speeches (\( \bar{t} = 6 \) mins 59 secs). There were 28 laughter instances in these 5
speeches for an average of 5.6 laughter instances in each speech. An average of one unique laughter instance was recorded for every 75 seconds of speech time.

Table 5.5: Audience Laughter recorded in the Bottom 10-Percentile (n = 5) of WCPS® Speeches based solely on Humor-Rhetoric Moments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WCPS® Speech ID</th>
<th>Speech Duration</th>
<th>Laughter Instances</th>
<th>Laughter Duration</th>
<th>&lt; 1 sec</th>
<th>≥ 1 sec, &lt; 2 sec</th>
<th>≥ 2 secs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12F4</td>
<td>7:09 min</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12F5</td>
<td>7:10 min</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12F7</td>
<td>6:56 min</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14F1</td>
<td>6:23 min</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17F8</td>
<td>7:17 min</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>34:55 min</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>6:59 min</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.6</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.6</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand, for the top 10-percentile (n = 6) of WCPS® speeches, solely in terms of humor-rhetoric moments, 70 moments of laughter with a duration of ≥ 2 seconds were recorded. Because a total of 262 humor-rhetoric moments manifested in the 57 WCPS® speeches, 26.7% of all humor-rhetoric moments were concentrated in these 6 WCPS® speeches. Table 5.6 breaks down the laughter instances recorded in these 6 speeches (\(\bar{t} = 7\) mins 05 secs). There were 157 laughter instances in these 6 speeches for an average of 26.2 laughter instances in each speech. An average of one unique laughter instance was recorded for every 16 seconds of speech time. The WCPS® speeches by 13F9, 14F7, 15F10, 16F3, 16F5, and 17F3 incited audience laughter at a particularly high frequency.
Table 5.6: Audience Laughter recorded in the Top 10-Percentile (n = 6) of WCPS®

Speeches based solely on Humor-Rhetoric Moments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speech ID</th>
<th>Speech Duration</th>
<th>Laughter Instances</th>
<th>Laughter Duration</th>
<th>Laughter Duration</th>
<th>Laughter Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; 1 sec</td>
<td>≥ 1 sec, &lt; 2 sec</td>
<td>≥ 2 secs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13F9</td>
<td>6:12 min</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14F7</td>
<td>7:05 min</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15F10</td>
<td>7:16 min</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16F3</td>
<td>7:22 min</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16F5</td>
<td>7:20 min</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17F3</td>
<td>7:15 min</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>42:31 min</strong></td>
<td><strong>157</strong></td>
<td><strong>39</strong></td>
<td><strong>48</strong></td>
<td><strong>70</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>7:05 min</strong></td>
<td><strong>26.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>6.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>11.6</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: As explained in (the final paragraphs of) section 4.2, the 70 humor-rhetoric moments in the WCPS® speeches by 13F9, 14F7, 15F10, 16F3, 16F5, and 17F3 were more rigorously scrutinized with inter-coder checks for connotated Technique, Target, and Appeal.

5.2 Analyzing Location [Where?]

Analyzing the variable of location is directed by the inquiry: “Where did the rhetorical humor take place? How so did the locational setting impact rhetorical humor?” The variability and the similarity of the locational setting in terms of its (i) physical setting, (ii) social environment, and (iii) cultural backdrop impacted how humor in rhetoric manifested.

Different Physical Settings

The physical setting of the location most distinctly varied in terms of the city where the World Championship of Public Speaking® (WCPS®) was held. The city where the 2012, 2013, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017 WCPS® was held were Orlando
(Florida), Cincinnati (Ohio), Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Las Vegas (Nevada), Washington (D.C), and Vancouver (Canada) respectively. How the specific venue differed is shown in Table 5.7. For example, the 2012 WCPS® was held at a Creek Resort location, whereas the 2015 WCPS® was held at a Casino-Hotel location.

Table 5.7: Locational Details Where the 57 WCPS® Speeches were Produced

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WCPS® Date &amp; Start-time</th>
<th>City, State/Country</th>
<th>Specific Venue</th>
<th>Audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug 18, 2012 [Sun] 9am</td>
<td>Orlando, Florida</td>
<td>Hilton Bonnet Creek Resort</td>
<td>1500+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 24, 2013 [Sat] 9am</td>
<td>Cincinnati, Ohio</td>
<td>Duke Energy Convention Center</td>
<td>1600+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 23, 2014 [Sat] 9am</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre</td>
<td>3000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 15, 2015 [Sat] 12pm</td>
<td>Las Vegas, Nevada</td>
<td>Caesars Palace Casino-Hotel</td>
<td>2500+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 20, 2016 [Sat] 8.30am</td>
<td>Washington, D.C</td>
<td>Marriott Marquis</td>
<td>1600+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 25, 2017 [Fri] 8pm</td>
<td>Vancouver, Canada</td>
<td>Vancouver Convention Centre</td>
<td>2500+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Details of the reported Audience in-attendance and the WCPS start-time were obtained from the archives of news releases in https://mediacenter.toastmasters.org

The variance in the physical setting impacted how humor-rhetoric was produced. Unique attributes of the location where the WCPS® was held in were used by the WCPS® finalists for their humor in rhetoric. For example, Laughter ID 12F6.8 (see: https://youtu.be/plH8lfhHrqU?t=105) leveraged on the unique aspect of the 2012 WCPS® venue (i.e. Hilton Bonnet Creek Resort) being a five minutes’ drive from the Disneyland attraction. Other examples included: the audience responding with laughter when a speaker spoke about “trying to hit Triple Sevens here in Las Vegas” (see 15F4.2: https://youtu.be/ZI3JoNoAh7g?t=108) in the WCPS® that was held in Las Vegas, and the audience reacting with laughter immediately when a speaker made reference to “a great Canadian band - the Barenaked Ladies” (see 17F3.36: https://youtu.be/xLG160Q9M?t=431) when the WCPS® was held in Vancouver,
Canada. Differing characteristics of the physical setting, where the WCPS® were held in, allowed differing physical references to be utilized for humor in rhetoric. **12F6.8, 15F4.2, and 17F3.26** are examples of humor in rhetoric that were uniquely pertinent for the physical setting where the laughter manifested and would likely not translate at a different WCPS® location, such as the 2014 WCPS® held in Malaysia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the <strong>Language, (Visual), [Audio]</strong> punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12F6.8</td>
<td>When I was 10 years old, I had a very good friend by the name of Andrew. Now, he was living my dream. [Speaker spoke with hostility] His father was rich. He had everything he wanted. The best toys. The best games. And he could go to <strong>Disneyland Orlando</strong> without competing in a speech contest (Speaker pointed at the audience, with a gun-shot gesture) [Speaker spoke with agitation in his voice] {Audience responded with laughter of $\geq 2000\text{ms}$}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15F4.2</td>
<td>… in the hopes of winning a prize - now it may seem simple, but then again so is trying to hit Triple Sevens here in <strong>Las Vegas</strong> {Audible laughter recorded was $\geq 1000\text{ms}$ and $&lt; 2000\text{ms}$}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17F3.36</td>
<td>… to steal a line from a great <strong>Canadian</strong> band - the <strong>Barenaked Ladies</strong> {Audience immediately laughed, but the audible laughter recorded was $&lt; 1000\text{ms}$ as the speaker did not pause}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Apart from qualitative differences, the different WCPS® physical settings contained different quantitative proportions of humor in rhetoric. Tables 5.8 and 5.9 show how the 6 WCPS® locations elicited different quantitative proportions of laughter instances and laughter moments respectively.

Table 5.8: How the Six Different WCPS® Locations elicited Different Quantitative Proportions of Laughter Instances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Contestants</th>
<th>Laughter Instances</th>
<th>Mean Laughter Instances / Speech</th>
<th>Standard Deviation of Laughter / Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012 WCPS® Speeches</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>6.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 WCPS® Speeches</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 WCPS® Speeches</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>9.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 WCPS® Speeches</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>7.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 WCPS® Speeches</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>7.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017 WCPS® Speeches</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>9.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All WCPS® Speeches</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>873</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>7.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.9: How the Six Different WCPS® Locations elicited Different Quantitative Proportions of Laughter Moments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Contestants</th>
<th>Laughter Moments</th>
<th>Mean Laughter Moments / Speech</th>
<th>S.D of Laughter Moments / Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012 WCPS® Speeches</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 WCPS® Speeches</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 WCPS® Speeches</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>3.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 WCPS® Speeches</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 WCPS® Speeches</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When the variable of the six different WCPS® locations was compared against the variable of laughter instances in each speech, there was no significant difference, $F(5, 51) = 0.696, p = 0.629$. There is no evidence to suggest that the six different physical settings contained *significantly* different quantities of laughter instances, $p > .05$. This null finding is modulated by the high standard deviation in laughter instances among the 57 WCPS® speeches. As shown in Table 5.8, the standard deviation (i.e. how much members of a group on average differ from the mean value of the group) of laughter instances among the 57 WCPS® speeches was 7.90. This meant that, on average, the 57 WCPS® speeches differed in laughter instances by 7.90 from the mean of 15.3.

When the variable of the six different WCPS® locations was compared against the variable of laughter moments in each speech, there was no significant difference too, $F(5, 51) = 1.78, p = 0.134$. There is no evidence to suggest that the six different physical settings contained significantly different quantities of laughter moments between any possible combination of pairwise comparison, $p > .05$. This null finding is modulated by the high standard deviation in laughter moments among the 57 WCPS® speeches. As shown in Table 5.9, the 57 WCPS® speeches differed in laughter moments by an average of 3.57 from the mean of 4.60. However, although not significantly less, what is glaringly noticeable is that much fewer laughter moments per speech were incited at the 2012 WCPS®. For example, there were 2.22 humor-rhetoric moments recorded per speech at the 2012 WCPS®, as compared to the 6.20 humor-rhetoric moments recorded per speech at the 2016 WCPS®.
Crucially, to examine how the location impacted how humor-rhetoric was produced cannot be investigated via analyzing the variability of the physical setting alone. Humor-rhetoric moments at the six different WCPS® locations were also influenced by the social environment and cultural backdrop.

Difference in Social Environment
The social environment of the location mainly varied in terms of (i) the audience quantity, (ii) the start-time of the WCPS®, and (iii) how the audience were seated. Pictures of the differences in how the audience were seated in the 2012 to 2017 WCPS® are shown in Supplementary Material 1 (which is attached in the Appendices and can also be viewed at: http://bit.ly/ntuphd_SM1). Most strikingly, the seating of the audience in the 2012 WCPS® was far from the stage and not at full capacity. Additionally, unlike the 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016, and 2017 WCPS® where all audience in-attendance sat on a similar height-level from the ground, the 2014 WCPS® was the only social environment where the audience sat in varying height-levels to the stage. The audience at the 2014 WCPS® was restricted to non-movable seats that pre-determined varying eye-levels with the speaker. It was also impossible for the 2014 WCPS® contestants to look at all audience members with a similar plane-of-sight and therefore eye-contact for the audience with the speaker was impeded. Coincidentally or not, the 2012 WCPS® and the 2014 WCPS® had the least number of humor-rhetoric moments recorded per speech, as reported in Table 5.9. The social environment also differed in the audience quantity and the start-time of the WCPS®, as shown previously in Table 5.7. For example, there was twice the number of reported audience in-attendance for the 2014 WCPS® (i.e. 3000+) as compared to the 2012 WCPS® (i.e. 1500+). There was also a notable difference in
the start-time of the 2017 WCPS® that began at local time 8pm as compared to the 2014® WCPS that began at local time 9am.

The variance in the social environment influenced how humor-rhetoric was produced. For example, the morning social environment allowed for time-dependent situational humor to be used in rhetoric, which was evident in Laughter ID 14F3.26 (please see: https://youtu.be/7GyV6tLsiA8?t=419).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14F3.26</td>
<td>Sometimes, being right isn't always right. [Speaker spoke with certainty and deliberately paused.] So now, whenever I get frustrated or angry with the people around me, and the next time you get frustrated or angry with the people around you. Maybe they've shopped too many times at KLCC. {Audience responded with laughter of &lt; 1000ms} <strong>Maybe they got up late and that's why you're sitting up there</strong> [Speaker spoke with some annoyance in his tone] (Speaker pointed at the audience seated on the highest level up and away from the stage, before waving and smiling at them) {Audience responded with laughter of ≥ 2000ms}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The social situation of how some audience members sat on a higher ground that was up and away from the stage facilitated the situational humor in 14F3.26. This use of
humor in rhetoric during the 2014 WCPS® was dependent on a morning setting and the social environment. The morning-time humor that leveraged on the social situation of people over-sleeping in the morning would be less appropriate for the social setting of the 2017 WCPS® that began in the evening at 8pm. Differing aspects of the social environment influenced how humor was used in rhetoric.

Difference in Cultural Backdrop

The cultural backdrop of the WCPS® had variances on a year by year basis. The global events in the weeks leading up to the WCPS® of that year influenced how humor was used in rhetoric. For example, the 2012 WCPS® took place less than 7 days after Usain Bolt won triple gold medals (i.e. the 100 meters, 200 meters, and 4X100 meters relay) at the 2012 Summer Olympics (which concluded on 12 August 2012). At that time in August 2012, Usain Bolt was well-known in the news for his showmanship, ability to continually break world records in sprinting, and renowned statements such as “I am now a legend. I am the greatest athlete to live.” In Laughter ID 12F2.9 (please see: https://youtu.be/DqZBHSPQ0_k?t=292), speaker 12F2 harnessed the public imagery of Usain Bolt for his humor in rhetoric. Through his gestures and words, 12F2 pertinently evoked the memory of Usain Bolt and playfully suggested that the audience could be 10 times faster than him. How the cultural backdrop uniquely was in August 2012 facilitated a laughter moment for ≥ 2000ms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

137
| 12F2.9 | Your brain can think at 268 miles an hour. And that makes you (both index fingers point at you) 10 times faster than … [Spilt silence] Usain Bolt (both index fingers point diagonally in an iconic Usain Bolt pose) [Confident tone] {Audience responded with laughter of $\geq 2000$ms} |

To provide another example, the 2016 WCPS® occurred in a month when playing Pokémon on mobile was a societal craze. The augmented reality mobile game was a revolutionary phenomenon at that time period for legions of people to be out in the streets using their GPS (Global Positioning System) to locate, capture, battle, and train virtual creatures called Pokémon. In August 2016, the widespread societal behavior of playing Pokémon was at its maniac peak. The shares of Nintendo Co., Ltd. (which owns the mobile game Pokémon) doubled by £16 billion in less than 2 weeks to signify the intensity of which global investors want to bankroll the corporation (The Guardian, 2016). In Laughter ID 16F2.11 (please see: https://youtu.be/8e4k29kErCe?t=363), speaker 16F2 leveraged on the societal Pokémon craze for his humor in rhetoric. How the cultural backdrop uniquely was in the month of August 2016 facilitated laughter of $\geq 2000$ms to manifest. If 16F2 alluded to playing Pokémon for a WCPS® speech in the month of August 2012, August 2015, or even August 2017, the differential cultural backdrop would likely not have facilitated an eruption of boisterous laughter. The variances in the cultural backdrop on a year by year basis impacted how WCPS® speakers crafted their humor in rhetoric.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16F2.11</td>
<td>… who needs them? I've got Pokémon [Speaker spoke with uninterest.] (Speaker took out his mobile phone.) {Audience responded with laughter of ≥ 2000ms}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarity in the Physical Settings

However, as much as there were physical and sociocultural variances at the six WCPS® locations, there were also similarities at the six locational settings. In terms of physical similarities, the six WCPS® locations were most conspicuously similar in terms of the presence of big projector screen(s). How the big projection screens were a part of the stage for the 2012 to 2017 WCPS® are shown in the pictures of Supplementary Material 1 (which is attached in the Appendices and can also be viewed at: [http://bit.ly/ntuphd_SM1](http://bit.ly/ntuphd_SM1)). The big projection screens served to magnify the facial expressions and body gestures of the competing speakers for the attending-audience to view in real time. WCPS® speakers physically interacting with the big projection screen of the stage setting to trigger audience laughter was a recurring occurrence. Exemplifying examples include 13F1.4 (see: [https://youtu.be/wfree08EBDA?t=152](https://youtu.be/wfree08EBDA?t=152)), 14F4.4 (see: [https://youtu.be/9pFpregJxkM?t=183](https://youtu.be/9pFpregJxkM?t=183)), and 16F10.13 (see: [https://youtu.be/F5K4qR9Pm3M?t=483](https://youtu.be/F5K4qR9Pm3M?t=483)).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the <em>Language, (Visual), [Audio]</em> punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 13F1.4       | I’ve been a Toastmaster for over a decade. I love standing up in front of people and talking. Maybe I wasn't held enough as a baby.  
{Audience laughed for $\geq 1000\text{ms and } < 2000\text{ms}$.} But to feel the energy of the crowd, thousands of eyeballs on me, the spotlight, the **jumbo screen**. Ahh the **jumbo screen**. Oh, that might be a bit much.  
{Audience laughed for $\geq 1000\text{ms and } < 2000\text{ms}$.} **Wow look at my chin.** [Speaker spoke with amazement in his tonality] It's the size of a sofa. (Speaker looked at the **stage projection screen**, rubbed and inspected his chin, and pretended to look dazed) {Audience responded with laughter of $\geq 2000\text{ms}$} |
| 14F4.4       | What do you want? What did I want? When I went off to college, I decided that what I really wanted was to be a broadcast journalist. I wanted to report the news, cover entertainment, and introduce music videos on MTV. **I wanted my face on every TV across the world.**  
[Speaker spoke with passion and energy.] Hey look. (Speaker pointed at the **stage projection screen**, smiling widely to show both upper and lower teeth) {Audience responded with laughter of $\geq 2000\text{ms}$} |
| 16F10.13     | You don't need a massive stage. You don't need a **huge screen** with your head blown up on it. (Speaker hand-gestured at the **stage projection screen** before casting a sideways glare at it to display un-
You don't want to see your head that huge. [Speaker conveyed displeasure in her tonality] {Audience responded with laughter of $\geq 2000$ms}

Gesticulating with the stage projection screen in 13F1.4, 14F4.4, and 16F10.13 for humor in rhetoric would be translatable at another WCPS® setting because projection screen(s) being a part of the stage was a recurring similarity in all locations of the WCPS® analyzed. Interacting with the physical setting of the location can create humor in rhetoric.

Similarity in the Social Environment

The social environment at the 6 WCPS® locations had the commonality that most people in the sitting-audience (i) engaged in an overnight stay to attend the WCPS®, (ii) sat close together, and (iii) were in normative semi-formal wear. The Toastmasters Convention regulating the 2012 to 2017 WCPS® were all 4 days long. Apart from the WCPS® main-event, there were education sessions, leadership sessions, the Inter-District Semi-Finals and plenary assemblies (e.g. opening ceremony, annual general meeting, presidential inauguration of newly elected key appointment holders). During the 3-hour WCPS® main-event, the attendees were mostly seated close together and were mostly wearing the recommended dress code of semi-formal business attire. Pictures of the audiences at the social setting of the 2012 to 2017 WCPS® are shown in Supplementary Material 1. Majority of the audiences were in business attire, dressed in suits, pants, dresses, shirts, and blazers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID #</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Laughter</strong></td>
<td>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the <strong>Language, (Visual), [Audio]</strong> punchline is detailed in Grey.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **16F9.1** | My wife's arm was covered with bug bites. It took one month having to move and throwing away $3,000 worth of bedroom furniture, before finally winning the battle with bed bugs. She swears she got them on an **overnight stay.** At a **convention** [Speaker spoke with authority and had an undertone of intimidation in his voice to ‘warn’ the audience]  
{Audience responded with laughter of $\geq 2000$ms} |
| **15F7.1** | Your life is like a thermostat. You can dial it down or you can dial it up. Mr. Contest Chair, fellow Toastmasters and guests, do you want to dial some part of your life up to a higher level? (Speaker gestured for the audience to raise their hands) Turn to someone next to you (Speaker gestured to the audience to face one another) and I want you to say to this person with power, clarity, and conviction. **Up yours.** [Speaker spoke with power, clarity, and conviction] (Speaker smiled with lips-touching, and held his left index finger up) {Audience responded with laughter of $\geq 2000$ms} |
| **12F6.6** | [I could not decide on my sole purpose] I read the dress code and it said: **Semi** (kicks out left foot showing a casual shoe) **Formal** (kicks out right foot showing a formal shoe). [Speaker slowed his pace of speech down and spoke calmly] {Audience responded with laughter of $\geq 2000$ms} |
WCPS® speakers interacting with the inherent social environment brought forth humor in rhetoric. For example, in Laughter ID 16F9.1 (please see: https://youtu.be/TviVovKkgLg?t=56), the speaker acknowledged the social setting of an overnight convention to trigger laughter of more than 2000ms in the audience. In 15F7.1 (please see: https://youtu.be/F6CkJtc92w?t=44), the speaker leveraged on the close-proximity of audience members, and facilitated the audience to interact with him and other audience-members through his gesticulation, before delivering the Language punchline: “Up yours.” In 12F6.6 (please see: https://youtu.be/plH8lfHrqlU?t=70), the speaker acknowledged the recommended dress code of semi-formal and delivered a Visual punchline in how semi-formal can be interpreted alternatively. How the speaker interacted with the inherent social environment in each of these three examples to trigger audience laughter would be translatable and applicable to another WCPS® of another year. This is because the social setting of the audience (i) being at an overnight convention, (ii) being seated in general close-proximity, and (iii) being in semi-formal attire were similar across the 6 WCPS® analyzed. Interacting with the social environment at the WCPS® location is one facet of how WCPS® speakers produced their humor in rhetoric.

Similarity in the Cultural Backdrop

The cultural backdrop of the WCPS® had a recurring similarity every year. All WCPS® from 2012 to 2017 were administrated by the Toastmasters organization. This similarity in the cultural backdrop across all 6 WCPS® locations contributed to instances of humor in rhetoric that referenced common knowledge of the organization. Exemplifying examples include 13F1.1 (see:
I don't know what it's like to jump from rooftop to rooftop, escaping those intent on doing me harm. But my friend Bernard does. He's in his 50’s. Used to be a boxer still looks like one. The man has been on both ends of a gun and has literally stared death in the face. **What would cause a man like this to shake with fear? The Ice-Breaker.**

[Intimidating Tone] (Speaker steps forward and raises his eyebrows)

{Audience laughed for ≥ 2000ms}

Let me show you. [A concocted sound effect was produced, and the audience laughed for < 1 second] You never know who you're gonna find when you reach out. **I found a DJM: Distinguished Jack Master.**

[Declarative tone] (Speaker repeatedly nods his head) {Audience laughed for ≥ 2000ms}

Every great question that has advanced civilization started with what if. What if we could fly? What if we could walk on the moon? What if we could speak for 5 to 7 minutes without ‘Um’-ing or ‘Ah’-ing?
In Laughter ID 13F1.1, 13F1 asked the audience what would cause a former boxer who has been on both ends of a gun and has literally stared death in the face to “shake with fear”. When 13F1 revealed the answer to be “The Ice-Breaker”, laughter for ≥ 2000ms manifested. “The Ice-Breaker” refers to the first speech that all Toastmasters give when they are first enrolled into the organization and it is normal for some first-time members to feel afraid when it is their first speech at Toastmasters. In 13F9.26, 13F9 declared that he found a “DJM: Distinguished Jack Master” and laughter for ≥ 2000ms arose which can be ascribed to the wordplay substitution of the DTM acronym. The acronym of DTM refers to Distinguished Toast Master and is an accolade for Toastmasters members who had given at least 45 speeches and served some leadership roles. The usage of the acronym DTM is an established norm within the organization that 13F9 assumed the sitting-audience knows. In 12F2.5, 12F2 posed the rhetorical question “what if we could speak for five to seven minutes without ‘Um’-ing or ‘Ah’-ing” from which the audience laughed for ≥ 2000ms. Again, the WCPS® speaker assumed the sitting-audience has basic knowledge of the cultural practices at Toastmasters. At a typical Toastmasters club meeting, it is protocol that one member is tasked to count the number of ‘Ah’, ‘Um’, or any other word or sound that is used as a pause filler by anyone who speaks, and then ceremoniously report the number of times each speaker used pause fillers so as to constructively shame people to be more professional when speaking in public. A standard Toastmasters speech is typically restricted to a time duration of
five to seven minutes too. To “speak for five to seven minutes without ‘Um’-ing or ‘Ah’-ing” is a customary aim of Toastmasters speeches that 12F2 broadcasted for laughter to emanate.

In 13F1.1, 13F9.26, and 12F2.5, insider aspects of the organization were referenced as a common thread for the humor in rhetoric. These three examples are also translatable to another WCPS® of another year since the cultural backdrop of the WCPS® being administrated by the Toastmasters organization is a recurring similarity at all six locational settings analyzed. Awareness of the cultural setting at the WCPS® location is one facet of how WCPS® finalists produced their humor in rhetoric. The variable of the locational setting, where the WCPS® took place, influenced how humor was used in rhetoric.

5.3 Analyzing Producer-Consumer Relation [Who?]

The analysis of the relational setting is directed by the inquiry: “Who were the people producing and consuming the rhetorical humor? How so did their relational dynamic impact rhetorical humor?” The variability and similarity in terms of (i) who produced the rhetorical humor, (ii) who consumed the rhetorical humor, and (iii) their relational dynamic impacted how humor in rhetoric manifested.

Different Producers:

The producers of the 57 WCPS® speeches were different, most notably, in terms of (i) the country that they were representing, (ii) gender, and (iii) physical appearance. Specific details in how each of the 57 WCPS® speeches were different based on their sequential order of presentation, speech title, speaker’s name and gender, the
Toastmasters District being represented, and the Country/ City/ State that the represented Toastmasters District is based at, are documented in Appendix B (which can also be viewed at: http://bit.ly/ntuphd_Appendix). Table 5.10 summarizes the countries being represented at the 2012 to 2017 WCPS®. Even though there were Toastmasters competitors from 140+ countries competing to qualify for the WCPS® annually, only 14 countries had representatives that qualified for the 2012 to 2017 WCPS®. There were 34 contestants representing the United States of America (USA), and 23 contestants representing non-USA countries (namely Canada with 4 contestants, India with 3 contestants, Singapore with 3 contestants, Sri Lanka with 3 contestants, United Kingdom with 2 contestants, and 1 contestant each from Australia, Brunei, China, Malaysia, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and United Arab Emirates). In addition, the 57 WCPS® speeches were produced by 46 males and 11 females who differed as well as in their physical appearance, such as body stature and age. The age of the WCPS® contestants ranged from people in their 20s to people in their 60s.

Table 5.10: Countries that the 57 WCPS® speeches Represented, Arranged According to Frequency Count and then Alphabetical Order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries that the 57 WCPS® speeches Represented</th>
<th>Frequency Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States of America (USA)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The pre-existing demographic qualities of the varying producers influenced how humor was produced in rhetoric. For example, speaker 14F3 who represented the city of Guangzhou in the state of Guangdong, China, was rhetorical in his use of humor concerning China in 14F3.9 (please see: https://youtu.be/7GyV6tLsiA8?t=158) to 14F3.11 (i.e. https://youtu.be/7GyV6tLsiA8?t=190). 14F3 referenced the reality that Chinese migrants of previous generations had to work very hard to leave China. He also commented that China does not want more Chinese, which has basis-in-reality when one knows of the birth control measures in China. Conspicuously, 14F3 imitated a stereotypically Chinese manner of speaking English that differed considerably from his baseline speech in standard English. It was integral that 14F3 has an ethnic-Chinese look and was representing a Toastmasters District from China. Without his pre-existing demographic qualities, his rhetoric about China may be perceived as insensitive (or even racist) and his humor may not be rhetorical in eliciting laughter, applause, and cheers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14F3.9</td>
<td>For the last three years, my mom and dad had been fuming over my decision to quit my job in good and under Australia to move to China. They'll say to me, “Son, why you quit your job? [Speaker imitated a stereotypically Chinese manner of speaking English] Why you waste your time? Your mother and I worked so hard to leave China [Speaker spoke with agitation] (Speaker looked frustrated and nodded together with the audience laughter) {Audience responded with laughter of ≥ 2000ms}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14F3.11</td>
<td>Now you want to go back! {Laughter recorded was ≥ 1000ms and &lt; 2000ms, under 14F3.10} There are 1.3 billion people in China, they don't need one more. [Speaker spoke with agitation] (Speaker walked back in concession, was shifty in his eyes, and demonstrated himself walking away from the conversation) {Audience responded with laughter of ≥ 2000ms with applause and cheers being audible}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The gender of a speaker influenced how humor was produced in rhetoric as well. For example, in Laughter ID 14F6.11 (please see: [https://youtu.be/BqnfO-ANAd0?t=238](https://youtu.be/BqnfO-ANAd0?t=238)), the audience reacted with laughter of ≥ 2000ms when the male speaker communicated the punchline, “I’m expecting”. The gender difference in what “I’m expecting” can mean is the main trigger for this rhetorical humor. A female saying
that “I’m expecting” can have a double-meaning of “I’m pregnant” or the literal meaning that “I’m expecting”, but a male saying that “I’m expecting” does not have a second possible meaning of “I’m pregnant”. Any male can say this joke in the exact same manner as 14F6 for the humor in rhetoric that he is not literally pregnant. However, a female cannot convey this joke in the exact same manner as 14F6 because the punchline of “I’m expecting” can mean that she is still pregnant. The production of this humor-rhetoric hinged on the gender of the speaker saying the punchline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14F6.11</td>
<td>Valencia and I have something to say. We want you to be the first to know. That we're pregnant! Well I mean, Valencia's pregnant. I'm expecting. (Speaker was sitting. There were no noteworthy visuals observed that differed from baseline) [Speaker spoke with passion, and shouted “pregnant” before his tonality transitioned back to his baseline voice of speech] {Audience responded with laughter of ≥ 2 seconds}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, the physical appearance of a speaker influenced how humor was produced in rhetoric. For example, in Laughter ID 13F6.10 (please see: https://youtu.be/skrbJfJ1q94?t=225), 13F6 referred to the appearance of his protruding tummy while lying on the floor to create a “mountain range” joke about himself. A speaker with a flat tummy would not be able to create the same “mountain range”
punchline. For another example, in Laughter ID 16F9.17 (please see: https://youtu.be/TviVovKkgLg?t=335), 16F9 referred to his age of “50 years old” that allowed him to be both a parent and a grandparent at the same time. The congruency of the speaker’s middle-age physical appearance facilitated the humor in 16F9.17 to appeal rhetorically. A speaker can create humor in rhetoric by referring to the uniqueness of one’s physical attributes, such as one’s body shape or age. Different speakers created differing humor-rhetoric that were pertinent to their demographic profile. The profile of the speakers (e.g. gender, physical appearance, the country/district that s/he is representing) impacted how humor in rhetoric was produced.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13F6.10</td>
<td>I could do anything, anytime. Life was good. In fact, I would lie on the ground like this. Oooh a bit of a mountain range here [Speaker spoke casually with a higher pitch] (Speaker gestured over his protruding tummy while lying on the floor) {Audience responded with laughter of ≥ 2000ms}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16F9.17</td>
<td>I’m 50 years old, and three weeks ago, my wife gave birth to our first child. [Audience applauded] Thank you. When you have a kid at my age, you get to be a dad and a grandpa, all at the same time. (Speaker brought both of his hands together and clasped them) [Speaker spoke with excitement] {Audience responded with laughter of ≥ 2000ms}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
However, as much as there were *qualitative* differences in how differing producers produced differential humor in rhetoric, no significant *quantitative* differences emerged. The variability in gender (see Tables 5.11 and 5.12) and in country represented (see Tables 5.13 and 5.14) did not significantly impact humor-rhetoric quantitatively, in terms of the quantity of laughter instances and the quantity of laughter moments manifested.

Table 5.11: How the variable of gender in the WCPS® Speakers interacted with the variable of Laughter Instances recorded per speech

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Contestants</th>
<th>Laughter Instances</th>
<th>Mean Laughter Instances / Speech</th>
<th>S.D of Laughter Instances / Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female WCPS® Speakers</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>8.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male WCPS® Speakers</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>708</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>7.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All WCPS® Speakers</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>873</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>7.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the variable of gender in the producing-speakers was compared against the variable of laughter instances, there was no significant difference observed, $t (55) = 0.146, p = 0.884$, using an independent-samples $t$ test. When the Mann-Whitney $U$ test was applied to compare female versus male speakers, there was still no significant difference between genders in laughter instances produced, $U = 250.5, p = 0.960$. There is no evidence to suggest that the laughter instances produced by female speakers ($Mdn = 13.0, M = 15.0, SD = 8.44$) were significantly lesser in quantity as compared to male speakers ($Mdn = 14.5, M = 15.4, SD = 7.86$), $p > 0.05$. 

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Table 5.12: How the variable of gender in the WCPS® Speakers interacted with the variable of Laughter Moments recorded per speech

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Contestants</th>
<th>Laughter Moments</th>
<th>Mean Laughter Moments / Speech</th>
<th>S.D of Laughter Moments / Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female WCPS® Speakers</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male WCPS® Speakers</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All WCPS® Speakers</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the variable of gender in the WCPS® Speakers was compared against the variable of laughter moments, there was no significant difference observed, \( t(55) = 0.414, p = 0.680 \), using an independent-samples \( t \) test. When the Mann-Whitney \( U \) test was applied to compare female versus male speakers, there was still no significant difference between genders in laughter moments produced, \( U = 220.5, p = 0.509 \). There is no evidence to suggest that the laughter moments produced by female speakers (\( Mdn = 5.0, M = 5.00, SD = 3.19 \)) were significantly more in quantity as compared to male speakers (\( Mdn = 3.5, M = 4.50, SD = 3.68 \)), \( p > 0.05 \).

Table 5.13: How the variable of Country Represented by the WCPS® Speakers interacted with the variable of Laughter Instances recorded per speech

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Contestants</th>
<th>Laughter Instances</th>
<th>Mean Laughter Instances / Speech</th>
<th>S.D of Laughter Instances / Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WCPS® Speakers from USA</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>7.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCPS® Speakers not from USA</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>8.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCPS® Speakers from USA</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>7.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCPS® Speakers from Canada</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCPS® Speakers from India</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>7.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCPS® Speakers from Singapore</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WCPS® Speakers from Sri Lanka 3 44 14.7 8.62

Note: WCPS® Speakers from United Kingdom, Australia, Brunei, China, Malaysia, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and United Arab Emirates were excluded from the one-way ANOVA analysis because their sample sizes were too small.

When the variable of country represented by the WCPS® speakers, in terms of USA vs non-USA, was compared against the variable of laughter instances in an independent-samples $t$ test, there was no significant difference observed, $t(55) = 1.19, p = 0.239$. When the Mann-Whitney $U$ test was applied to compare laughter instances produced by USA WCPS® speakers ($Mdn = 13.5$) versus non-USA WCPS® speakers ($Mdn = 18.0$), there was no significant difference too, $U = 327.5, p = 0.301$.

When the variable of country represented by the WCPS® speakers, in terms of USA vs Canada vs India vs Singapore vs Sri Lanka, was compared against the variable of laughter instances in a one-way ANOVA $F$ test, there was still no significant difference observed, $F(4, 42) = 1.21, p = 0.322$. Although by observation in Table 5.13, it seemed that non-USA speakers ($M = 16.8, SD = 8.60$), such as Singapore speakers ($M = 22.3, SD = 2.08$), elicited more laughter instances than USA speakers ($M = 14.3, SD = 7.35$), the differences observed are not significant, $p > .05$. The country that a WCPS® Speaker represented did not significantly impact the quantity of laughter instances recorded.

Table 5.14: How the variable of Country Represented by the WCPS® Speakers interacted with the variable of Laughter Moments recorded per speech.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Contestants</th>
<th>Laughter Moments</th>
<th>Mean Laughter Moments/ Speech</th>
<th>S.D of Laughter Moments/ Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WCPS® Speakers from USA</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCPS® Speakers not from USA</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>5.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCPS® Speakers from USA</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCPS® Speakers from Canada</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCPS® Speakers from India</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCPS® Speakers from Singapore</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCPS® Speakers from Sri Lanka</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: WCPS® Speakers from United Kingdom, Australia, Brunei, China, Malaysia, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and United Arab Emirates were excluded from the one-way ANOVA analysis because their sample sizes were too small.

When the variable of country represented by the WCPS® speakers, in terms of USA vs non-USA, was compared against the variable of laughter moments in an independent-samples *t* test, there was no significant difference observed, *t* (55) = 1.96, *p* = 0.55. When the Mann-Whitney *U* test was applied to compare laughter moments produced by USA WCPS® speakers (*Mdn* = 3.0) versus non-USA WCPS® speakers (*Mdn* = 6.0), there was no significant difference too, *U* = 275.5, *p* = 0.59.

When the variable of country represented by the WCPS® speakers, in terms of USA vs Canada vs India vs Singapore vs Sri Lanka, was compared against the variable of laughter moments in a one-way ANOVA *F* test, there was still no significant difference observed, *F* (4, 42) = 1.78, *p* = 0.151. Although by observation in Table 5.14, it seemed that non-USA speakers (*M* = 5.70, *SD* = 3.81), such as Singapore speakers (*M* = 8.33, *SD* = 2.52), elicited more laughter moments than USA speakers (*M* = 3.85, *SD* = 3.25), the differences observed are not significant, *p* > .05. The
country that a WCPS® Speaker represented did not significantly influence the quantity of laughter moments recorded.

Differing Consumers

The consumers of the 57 WCPS® speeches were different in terms of the geographic region that they were based in. The audience-in-attendance, most broadly, differed between a North America sitting-audience and a Malaysian sitting-audience. As shown previously in Table 5.7, the 2014 WCPS® occurred in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, whereas the other five WCPS® analyzed occurred in North America. Humor that was rhetorical to one consumer group (e.g. the sitting-audience in Vegas, USA) would not necessarily be rhetorical to another consumer group (e.g. a sitting-audience in Malaysia).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15F4.10</td>
<td>I went to the claw machine right next to Kyle's. I put in my first dollar bill. Out came the claw. It just missed! And the whole crowd went aww. I put in my second dollar bill. Out came the claw. It got jammed. And the whole crowd went aww. I put in my final dollar bill. And I swear I could hear George Washington chuckle and seeing him wave goodbye to me, on the way into that machine. [Speaker spoke with certainty and vigor] (Speaker pointed vigorously at the ‘machine’) {Audience laughed for ≥ 2000ms}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Laughter ID 15F4.10 (please see: https://youtu.be/ZI3JoNoAh7g?t=199), the humor-rhetoric might have appealed to the 2015 WCPS® audience in Vegas with laughter recorded of $\geq$ 2000ms but it might not resonate with the audience at the 2014 WCPS® who were largely from Malaysia or the Asian region. This is because most of the audience at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia would probably not know that the face of George Washington is printed on the US$1 bill. 15F4 assumed that most of the sitting audience in Vegas would be aware that George Washington is associated with the dollar bill for the humor of George Washington chuckling and waving goodbye to result in spontaneous laughter. Who the consumer group of attending audiences were influenced the rhetorical humor produced.

Relation Differentiation between the Producer and the Consumer

There was a role differentiation in the relationship between the producer-speaker and the consumer-audience at the WCPS®. The speakers were in a competitor role and were in a position of influence with at least 1500+ people listening to them. On the other hand, the audience were in a non-competitor role and were in a relatively passive (or less influential) position of listening to the WCPS® finalists.

How the role differentiation between the speaker and the audience manifested in humor-rhetoric was detectable in 12F6.8 (see: https://youtu.be/pH8lfhHrqU?t=105), and 15F7.1 (see: https://youtu.be/F6CkCjte92w?t=44). In 12F6.8, 12F6 made salient that most of the 1500+ sitting audience who were in a non-competitive, passive role could go to Disneyland “without competing” in a speech contest. 12F6, on the other hand, who is based in Kulim, Kedah, Malaysia, needs to actively compete in a
speech contest in order to travel to Disneyland Orlando. In 15F7.1, the relational roles of the speaker being instructive as an influencer and the audience complying as a listener to his directives facilitated the words of “Up yours”, which has vulgar connotations, to be rhetorically humorous. 15F7 was in a social role of authority over the vast listening audience, which was reported to be 2500+ people in attendance. An authority figure telling a massive audience to use this vulgar expression to one another sparked this laughter moment. The relational roles between the speaker and the audience having difference was important for this rhetorical humor to manifest. Laughter moment 15F7.1 hinged crucially on 15F7 being commanding enough in his role as a speaker for the (relatively inactive) audience to follow and uptake his active instructions. Broadly-speaking, by being in control of the microphone, WCPS® speakers had the relational power to actively influence what the sitting-audience was susceptibly salient about, or attending to, for laughter to spark.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12F6.8</td>
<td>When I was 10 years old, I had a very good friend by the name of Andrew. Now, he was living my dream. [Speaker spoke with hostility] His father was rich. He had everything he wanted. The best toys. The best games. And he could go to Disneyland Orlando without competing in a speech contest (Speaker pointed at the audience, with a gun-shot gesture) [Speaker spoke with agitation in his voice] {Audience laughed for ≥ 2000ms}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
15F7.1 Your life is like a thermostat. You can dial it down or you can dial it up. Mr. Contest Chair, fellow Toastmasters and guests, do you want to dial some part of your life up to a higher level? (Speaker gestured for the audience to raise their hands) Turn to someone next to you (Speaker gestured to the audience to face one another) and I want you to say to this person with power, clarity, and conviction. Up yours. [Speaker spoke with power, clarity, and conviction] (Speaker smiled with lips-touching, and held his left index finger up) {Audience laughed for ≥ 2000ms} 

Similarity in the Producers, Consumers, and Producer-Consumer Relation

As much as there were (i) demographic differences among the 57 Producers, (ii) geographic differences among the 6 Consumer-Audiences, and (iii) relational differences between the role of a speaker and the role of an audience, there is a fundamental similarity tying the speakers, the audience and their relation. The people who produced and consumed the rhetoric at the World Championship of Public Speaking® were predominately Toastmasters.

This broad similarity among the audience and the speakers being Toastmasters regularly impacted how humor-rhetoric was produced at this relational setting. Many speakers explicitly highlighted this shared relationship (i.e. ‘us’ being “Toastmasters”) for humor in rhetoric. Exemplifying examples include 15F6.9 (see: https://youtu.be/qQzq_yCygfU?t=381), 16F5.10 (see:}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the <strong>Language, (Visual), [Audio]</strong> punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>15F6.9</strong></td>
<td>The other day at the semifinals contest, five minutes before it began, I had to use the bathroom. Perfect timing. So, I ran inside without looking and the lady inside looked at me and said, “Can I help you?” {Audible laughter} <strong>I knew she was a Toastmaster.</strong> (Speaker bend his right arm 90° to gesture slightly forward) [Speaker spoke with certainty] {Audience laughed for ≥ 2000ms}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>16F5.10</strong></td>
<td>At age 14, when I go to school, my high school bully Greg would stop me in my tracks during recess and would tell me, “I'm gonna so get you outside. I'm gonna knock you in your teeth, punch you in the gut, and laugh at your sorry ‘behind’.” Well he didn't quite use the word ‘behind’. {Audible laughter} <strong>I just cleaned it up because it's a Toastmasters program.</strong> (Speaker circled his left hand twice while saying the word ‘cleaned’) {Audience laughed for ≥ 2000ms}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>16F1.3</strong></td>
<td>Look at what he's done! Look at him that little piece of Shhi…Ooh. {Audible laughter} <strong>I forgot that Toastmasters don't give that kind of feedback.</strong> [Tone varied from strong to slightly defeated] (Speaker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The word “Toastmasters” was explicitly used by the WCPS® finalists to create laughter for ≥ 2000ms in 15F6.13, 16F5.10, and 16F1.3. “Toastmasters” being helpful and respectful in speech are sub-communicated in the rhetoric by 15F6, 16F5, and 16F1. Making salient the shared relation between the audience and the speaker was one way in which WCPS® finalists produced humor in rhetoric. The relational setting, in terms of who produced (& who consumed) the humor-rhetoric and the speaker-audience relation, substantially affected how humor was created in rhetoric.

5.4 Analyzing Semiotic Mode [Which?]

Analyzing the mechanism of Semiotic Mode is directed by the inquiry: “Which form of semiotic play, in terms of Semiotic Mode(s), triggered the rhetorical humor? How so did the play in meaning-making signifiers denotate rhetorical humor?” In this study, only rhetorical humor that manifested ≥ 2000ms of audience laughter was scrutinized in terms of the preceding semiotics that denoted it.

How the Semiotic Modes of Visual, Language, Audio Denoted Humor-Rhetoric

For laughter of ≥ 2 seconds to manifest, it was necessary that the audience experienced (or at least perceived) a play with meaning(s). There were chiefly three semiotic modes that triggered a mental play of thoughts for the Toastmasters audience: (1) Language mode, (2) Visual mode, and (3) Audio mode. How the play
in Language words, the play in Visual images, and the play in Audio sounds, independently and interdependently, triggered the 262 laughter moments is summarized in Table 5.15.

Table 5.15: How the Play and Interplay in the Semiotic Modes of Language, Visual, Audio Triggered the 262 Laughter Moments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which Semiotic Mode(s) of Play Triggered Laughter Moments?</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Only</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Only</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio Only</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language + Visual</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language + Audio</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual + Audio</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language + Visual + Audio</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As explained in sub-section 3.1.4, there are seven different forms of semiotic play that trigger humor via the play of signs in the semiotic modes of: (i) Language, (ii) Visual, (iii) Audio. The results in Table 5.15 indicate that six different forms of semiotic play triggered the 262 laughter moments. Specifically, 1 humor-rhetoric moment was denoted by the play in language signifiers only, 16 humor-rhetoric moments were denoted by the play in visual signifiers only, 10 humor-rhetoric moments were denoted by the play in language + visual signifiers, 6 humor-rhetoric moments were denoted by the play in language + audio signifiers, 4 humor-rhetoric moments were denoted by the play in visual + audio signifiers, and 225 humor-
rhetoric moments were denoted by the play in language + visual + audio signifiers. The six forms of semiotic play are elaborated with at least one humor-rhetoric example in the report to follow.

How the Semiotic Mode of Visuals Denoted Humor-Rhetoric

During the 57 WCPS® Speeches, visual signifiers was the most prevalent, more so than language signifiers and audio signifiers. This is explainable as the audience was always seeing something visually but was not, at all moments, experiencing language (i.e. words) or hearing audio sounds (i.e. non-word sounds and vocal variations). The meaning-making potential in visuals alone is, however, not sufficient for laughter to be triggered; the audience had to perceive a play in the semiotic meaning of what is seen. In 15F10.1 (please see: https://youtu.be/qKFn803FO1c), the audience laughed for ≥ 2 seconds from only the stimulus of visuals seen. No audio sounds or language of words was required to elicit this moment of rhetorical humor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic Trigger which elicited ≥ 2000ms of laughter.</th>
<th>Which Semiotic Mode of Play triggered Laughter?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15F10.1</td>
<td>(Speaker began his speech by placing a cigarette in his mouth. He ignited a cigarette lighter, brought the lighter towards the cigarette and was about to light up the cigarette to smoke) {Audience gasped} {Audience gasped} (Speaker raised his eyebrows, held the tension in his</td>
<td>Visual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language, (Visual), [Audio]</td>
<td>The semiotic play of Language words</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
eyebrows and looked around at the audience in puzzlement.) \{Audience reacted with laughter of \geq 2 \text{ seconds}\} and Audio sounds were not observed\}

(A clip of 15F10.1 is available at: \url{https://youtu.be/qKFn803FO1c})

15F10 commenced his speech by playacting that he wanted to smoke. This playact was communicated through visual signifiers, such as placing a cigarette in his mouth, igniting a cigarette lighter, and then bringing the cigarette lighter closer to the cigarette in his mouth. Partly because he was visually explicit and convincing in the playact, gasps were audible from the audience. The audience gasping was likely a natural response arising from shock at his visual actions. Smoking right now being undesirable is sub-communicated by the audience to which 15F10 contradicted by dramatizing astonishment. 15F10 raised his eyebrows, held the tension in his eyebrows, and looked around at the audience in mock puzzlement. The (undesirable) meaning of smoking was being played with, which an audience perceived/appreciated and belched into laughter. Playing with the meaning of smoking triggered 4 more humor-rhetoric moments consecutively in 15F10.2 (see: \url{https://youtu.be/1aM5-l-fcCe}, if interested), 15F10.5 (see: \url{https://youtu.be/xWZRUE_Es3E}, if interested), 15F10.6 (see: \url{https://youtu.be/ZZSQcw-7esU}, if interested), and 15F10.8 (see: \url{https://youtu.be/oN83tH8dXZM}, if interested).

15F10.1, which elicited \geq 2 \text{ seconds} of audience’s laughter, was however denoted by only the visual signifiers presented by the speaker.
Among the results of the 262 humor-rhetoric moments, there were 15 other examples of speakers triggering laughter with only the semiotic play of visuals. For instance, in 15F5.9 (see: https://youtu.be/PQjvu1ZJioY?t=346), the speaker started dancing awkwardly and this playful use of his body gestures triggered laughter. The semiotic play of language words and the semiotic play of audio sound were not involved in this humor-rhetoric. For another example, in 16F5.1 (see: https://youtu.be/b1EaY2OdGSs?t=22), the speaker began his speech by staring at the audience and taking out a pair of underpants before proceeding to wear it over his formal attire as a prop for his speech. This playful visual act, with no semiotic use of sound or words by the speaker, manifested ≥ 2 seconds of audience laughter.

As much as the audience was mostly always seeing something visually (such as a speaker wearing a business attire and moving his/her mouth), visual information (such as the speaker’s apparel, face, posture) were not always the crux for a humor-rhetoric to manifest. Some humor-rhetoric moments manifested without any play in the semiotic mode of visual images. For example, in 14F9.2 (please see: https://youtu.be/0N1nhhAtlas?t=311), the visuals seen during this humor-rhetoric had no noticeable difference from the speaker’s baseline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic Trigger which elicited ≥ 2000ms of laughter.</th>
<th>Which Semiotic Mode of Play triggered Laughter?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14F9.2</td>
<td>To my wonderful audiences, I truly apologize as well. I too know that you expected a much grander</td>
<td>Language + Audio Interplay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.
The speech that 14F9 presented was titled “Imperfection” and was basically a speech of apology, whereby 14F9 expressed the remorse that he did not have a speech for the Finals because he only prepared a speech for the Semi-Finals. Throughout the 6-minutes speech (which is available at: [https://youtu.be/0N1nhhAtlas](https://youtu.be/0N1nhhAtlas)), his visual expressions were subdued and clasping his hands in front of him was a baseline posture that he did 17 times. In fact, 14F9 began his speech by clasping his hands and he held his hands clasped together throughout the first 38 seconds of his speech. He also mainly spoke with a remorseful and apologetic tone, except for the moment when he delivered the punchline “But hey, life’s full of surprises”, in an unapologetic tone. This semiotic interplay of Language + Audio triggered ≥ 2 seconds of laughter. Via his tonal contrast, there was a play in the meaning of being apologetic. Via the language punchline, there was also wit in playing with the meaning of surprise with the meaning of life. The audience hearing the change in audio tonality from apologetic to casual/light-heartedness when he started saying
“But hey...”, as well as the speaker playfully interpreting his remorse as one of “life’s” “surprises”, triggered this humor-rhetoric. During 14F9.2, the visual information seen for the audience was of the speaker clasping his hands as he spoke the punchline. There was no semiotic play in visuals. Clasping his hands together, with shoulders rolled in, was the baseline visual posture of 14F9 in this speech. The semiotic play of language and the semiotic play in audio sound (tonal quality) were the trigger for this humor-rhetoric, not the semiotic of visuals. Among the results of the 262 humor-rhetoric moments, there were only 6 other examples when ≥ 2 seconds of laughter was triggered, without the semiotic play of visuals. They are 14F6.11, 15F1.6, 16F8.1, 16F9.1, 16F9.6, 17F6.5. The specific details for each of these humor-rhetoric moments are documented in Appendix A (which can also be viewed at: http://bit.ly/ntuphd_Appendix). The online version of Appendix A is a filter-enabled Excel that allows each form of semiotic play to be sorted in terms of alphabetical order.

15F10.1 is an example of how humor-rhetoric was denoted by only the semiotic play of visuals. 14F9.2 is an example of how humor-rhetoric was denoted without the semiotic play of visuals. Overall, seeing a play in visuals (such as animated facial expressions, dynamic body gestures, and playacting with the props that the speaker brought to the stage) mostly triggered the audience to laugh. From the compiled results in Table 5.15 and in Appendix A, 255 of the 262 humor-rhetoric moments (i.e. 97.3%) were denoted by a semiotic play in visuals. Only 7 humor-rhetoric moments (i.e. 2.7%) were not preceded by a play in visual signifiers.

How the Semiotic Mode of Language Denoted Humor-Rhetoric
During the 57 WCPS® Speeches, the semiotic mode of language was also prevalent. As much as there was communication with non-language sounds, visual gestures and facial expression, speakers predominantly communicated with words. All the English words in the 57 WCPS® speeches were transcribed and are reported in Supplementary Material 2 (which is attached in the Appendices and can also be viewed at: http://bit.ly/ntuphd_SM2). In surveying the 57 transcripts, it is clear that the use of language alone is not sufficient for humor-rhetoric to manifest; the audience had to perceive a play in meaning(s) from the stimulus of language. For example, in 16F8.1 (please see: https://youtu.be/m3FzOljTgtU?t=43) the semiotic play of language alone resulted in the audience laughing for > 50 seconds. In this protracted humor-rhetoric moment, the audience was recorded to have laughed for > 50 seconds, all without seeing or hearing the speaker.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic Trigger which elicited ≥ 2000ms of laughter.</th>
<th>Which Semiotic Mode of Play triggered Laughter?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16F8.1</td>
<td>Aaron Beverly. Leave a lasting memory, using as few words as possible, and strive with every fiber of your being to avoid being the type of person who rambles on and on with no end in sight, more likely than not, causing more listeners to sit and think to themselves oh my goodness can somebody please make this stop. Leave a lasting memory, using as few words as possible, and strive with every fiber of</td>
<td>Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>{The semiotic play of visual and audio-elements were not observed}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
your being to avoid being the type of person who rambles on and on with no end in sight, more likely than not, causing more listeners to sit and think to themselves oh my goodness can somebody please make this stop. Aaron Beverly. | {Audience laughed throughout a period of > 50 seconds during the speech introduction, without seeing and without hearing the speaker.} (The Contest Chair spoke the Speaker’s name and Speech title with his baseline voice) [The facial expressions of the Contest Chair did not differ from his baseline visuals] (A clip of 16F8.1 is available at: https://youtu.be/m3FzOJIjTgpU?t=43)

Before all WCPS® speakers appear on stage, a Contest Chair is tasked to read out his/her name, speech title, speech title again, and his/her name again in that order. 16F8 was playful in the speech title that he gave to the Contest Chair. His speech title of: “Leave a lasting memory, using as few words as possible, and strive with every fiber of your being to avoid being the type of person who rambles on and on with no end in sight, more likely than not, causing more listeners to sit and think to themselves oh my goodness can somebody please make this stop.” was the language punchline. The meaning of “using as few words as possible” was contradicted with his ironic speech title which contained 57 words. The meaning of “leave a lasting impression” was applied in a playful manner that was true, but not in a manner that
the audience had expected. The normative meaning that a title of a speech should be concise was also playfully challenged with the exaggeratedly lengthy speech title.

The play with the meaning of words was the crux for this humor-rhetoric. The audience had no visual input and no audio input from the speaker. There was also no semiotic play of visual image and no semiotic play of audio sound observed in this humor-rhetoric. The responsibility of a Contest Chair is to be impartial, fair, and to be as objective as possible without demonstrating any favorable treatment to any speaker. During the speech introduction for 16F8 which required 78 seconds, the Contest Chair spoke with his baseline, normal voice and the facial expressions observed of the Contest Chair when compared to the other speech introduction he did for the other 9 contestants in the 2016 WCPS®, did not differ from his baseline. The semiotic play of language was pivotal for this humor-rhetoric. Specifically, the audience experienced a play in the meaning of “using as few words as possible”, a play in the meaning of “leave a lasting impression”, and a play in the normative meaning that a title of a speech should be concise to laugh for a protracted period of more than 50 seconds. The witty use of words manifested this humor-rhetoric.

The use of words did not however always result in laughter. This is most striking in 13F7.3 (please see: https://youtu.be/KNi87jGi5PU?t=156). The audience did not laugh when the speaker communicated with his words, but only laughed when the speaker communicated with an audio sound and an animated visual face. Specifically, 13F7 grunted a beast-like, non-word sound “Grrrrrrrrrrrrrr…” while twisting his lips and frowning his face at the same time for the audience to react with ≥ 2 seconds of laughter.
As much as there was a semiotic use of language, it was not the crux for this humor-rhetoric. There was no laughter triggered after the speaker communicated with words. There was only laughter recorded after the speaker presented a semiotic play in audio sound and a semiotic play in visual image. The audio signifier “Grrrrrrrrrrrrrr…” and the visual signifier of lips-twisting and face-frowning are atypical and playful and were vital for this rhetoric to result in laughter for ≥ 2 seconds. The semiotic interplay of Visual + Audio most directly triggered the laughter in 13F7.3, not the semiotic use of words. Among the results of the 262 humor-rhetoric moments, there were 3 other such examples when the playful sound of non-words co-occurred with playful visuals to manifest humor-rhetoric, without the semiotic play of language. They are 13F9.7 (see: https://youtu.be/KNi87jGi5PU?t=156), 13F9.14 (see: https://youtu.be/nMhS3MbJZeU?t=122), 13F9.14 (see: https://youtu.be/nMhS3MbJZeU?t=122), if interested), 13F9.14 (see:
16F8.1 is an example of how humor-rhetoric was denoted by only the semiotic play of words. 13F7.3 was an example of how humor-rhetoric was denoted without the semiotic play of words. Overall, triggering a play with meaning(s) in the audience’s mind through the use of words was what enabled the manifestation of laughter most of the time. From the compiled results Table 5.15 and in Appendix A, 242 of the 262 humor-rhetoric moments (i.e. 92.4%) were denoted by a semiotic play of language. Only 20 humor-rhetoric moments (i.e. 7.6%) were not denoted by the language signifiers of words.

How the Semiotic Mode of Audio Denoted Humor-Rhetoric

In this study, the semiotic of audio pertains to (i) non-word sounds and (ii) vocal variations. Because the WCPS® speakers spoke with vocal variations (such as tonality variations, variations in pitch, variations in volume, variations in the pace of speech, and emotional differences in their voice), the semiotic of audio was prevalent in the 57 speeches analyzed. On the other hand, non-word sounds were not often heard because the WCPS® speakers mainly spoke with the language of words. Non-word sounds include “Huhhhhh hahhh hahh huhh” (see: https://youtu.be/wuy4htAu334?t=304, if interested) and “Nngg, nngg, nngg” (see: https://youtu.be/nMhS3MbJZcU?t=122, if interested). These sounds are regarded as non-words because what is heard, from the speaker, cannot be found as an English language word in an English language dictionary. When the non-word sounds trigger a play of meaning(s) in an audience’s mind, laughter can manifest.
Among the 262 humor-rhetoric moments, there was a notable instance when the semiotic play of both non-word sounds and vocal variation, together, resulted in laughter. In 12F8.14 (please see: https://youtu.be/3QhpRYBFkKY?t=340), the speaker spoke the words “Sorry mum” with a vocal variation of embarrassment. An emotional difference in his voice, which deviated from his normal tonality, can be heard. He then chuckled the non-word sounds of “hhuuhhhhhhuuhhh hhuuhhh hhuhh” immediately. The audience upon seeing and hearing the speaker chuckling in laughter reacted with louder sounds of laughter. 12F8’s chuckling was instrumental for the manifestation of this humor-rhetoric.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic Trigger which elicited ≥ 2000ms of laughter.</th>
<th>Which Semiotic Mode of Play triggered Laughter?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12F8.14</td>
<td>I want kids. Warning though. This. 12 pounds at birth. [Speaker spoke with pride] (The audience can see visually that the speaker is very skinny) {Audience laughed for ≥ 2 seconds, under Laughter ID 12F8.13}</td>
<td>Audio + Visual + Language {The audio heard, the visuals seen, and the words used triggered this laughter}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sorry mum [Speaker spoke with embarrassment and started chuckling immediately: “hhuuhhhhhhuuhhh hhuuhhhh hhuhh] (Speaker was seen chuckling and laughing) {Audience reacted with laughter of ≥ 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Laughter ID # | Semiotic Trigger which elicited ≥ 2000ms of laughter. | Which Semiotic Mode of Play triggered Laughter? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12F8.14</td>
<td>I want kids. Warning though. This. 12 pounds at birth. [Speaker spoke with pride] (The audience can see visually that the speaker is very skinny) {Audience laughed for ≥ 2 seconds, under Laughter ID 12F8.13}</td>
<td>Audio + Visual + Language {The audio heard, the visuals seen, and the words used triggered this laughter}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sorry mum [Speaker spoke with embarrassment and started chuckling immediately: “hhuuhhhhhhuuhhh hhuuhhhh hhuhh] (Speaker was seen chuckling and laughing) {Audience reacted with laughter of ≥ 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
seconds} {Increased volume of audience’s laughter was observed after the speaker started chuckling and laughing.}

(A clip of 12F8.14 is available at: https://youtu.be/3QhpRYBFkKY?t=340)

Fundamentally, there was a semiotic play which arose from the contrast in audio signifiers. Hearing the speaker chuckling out loud, in the non-word sounds of “hhuuhhhhhuuuhhhh hhuuhhhhh hhuuhh”, at his own humor is humorous for the audience to result in the audience laughing as well. Also, in apologizing with a vocal tone of embarrassment, the speaker expressed a playful contrast that differed strikingly from his preceding emotion of pride when he declared that he was born “12 pounds at birth”\(^1\) affirmitively. There was a vocal variation in the emotion of the speaker’s voice from pride to (non-pride) embarrassment. Perceiving a semiotic play in the speaker’s emotions can be fun, if one perceives the humor, to result in laughter. Hearing the change in the meaning of what the speaker is feeling, when he transitioned from feeling proud of himself at having a heavy birth weight of “12 pounds” to feeling non-proud of himself can be rhetorically humorous. Importantly, visual signifiers enabled this humor-rhetoric. The sight of the speaker being obviously skinny and him chuckling at his own humor is funny enough to be laughter-inducing. Visually seeing the signifiers of the speaker laughing to show both upper teeth and laugh-line wrinkles at the outer corners of the eyes communicates a meaning of play and non-seriousness. Perceiving this visual and

\(^{1}\) 12 pounds (i.e. 5.44kg) at birth is objectively heavy, relative to the average birth weight. According to https://embryology.med.unsw.edu.au/embryology/index.php/Birth_Weight#Normal_Birth_Weight, the mean birth weight for all Australian babies born in 2015 was 3.33 kg (i.e. 7.34 pounds).
audio playfulness can result in the experience of humor for laughter to manifest. Additionally, the semiotic of language was also important for this humor-rhetoric because the speaker said the words, “Sorry mum”. The word “Sorry” has a literal meaning that one is apologetic or remorseful. The speaker could be feeling apologetic because of the difficulty his mother must have had in carrying and delivering a “12 pounds” baby. The speaker could also be feeling apologetic that his skinny light-weight as an adult is letting down his mother who delivered him overweight as a baby. However, if the speaker is truly apologetic or remorseful, he would not be laughing over it. There was a play in the meaning of being sorry, which, if perceived, can also result in laughter.

Audio signifiers (i.e. non-word sounds and vocal variations) were, however, not always required for ≥ 2 seconds of laughter to manifest. For example, in 12F6.3 (please see: https://youtu.be/plH8IfhHrqU?t=37), laughter was triggered without the semiotic play of audio signifiers. There was no vocal variation observed when the speaker said the punchline: “Shoes. They come in many shapes, many sizes”. The words said by the speaker were spoken with his baseline, normal voice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic Trigger which elicited ≥ 2000ms of laughter.</th>
<th>Which Semiotic Mode of Play triggered Laughter?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 12F6.3        | Contest chair, fellow judges, ladies & gentlemen:  
Shoes. They come in many shapes, many sizes  
[Speaker was speaking with his baseline voice. No | Visual + Language |


Laughter

ID #

Semiotic Trigger which elicited ≥ 2000ms of laughter.

The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.

Which Semiotic Mode of Play triggered Laughter?

Visual + Language
non-word sounds were heard. No vocal variation was heard] (Camera zooms out to reveal speaker wearing a formal-black shoe on his left foot and a casual-brown shoe on his left foot) (The two shoes that the speaker wore differed in shape and size.)

{The semiotic play of audio-elements was not observed}

(A clip of 12F6.3 is available at: https://youtu.be/plH8lfhHrqU?t=37)

The semiotic interplay of Visual + Language was what fundamentally triggered this humor-rhetoric. The audience laughed when they saw that the speaker was wearing different shoes, concurrently at the moment when he said the words that shoes can have different “shapes” and different “sizes”. This humor-rhetoric is playful because 12F6 visually applied what he verbally meant. A play in visual meaning of how shoes can be different is perceived for laughter to emanate. Notably, there was no semiotic play of audio sound observed in humor-rhetoric 12F6.3. No vocal variation (e.g. a lively voice varying to a deadpan tone or a deadpan tone varying to a lively voice) by 12F6 was observable in 12F6.3. 12F6 articulated the words in 12F6.3 with his default, speaking voice. Among the results of the 262 humor-rhetoric moments, there were only 9 other examples when ≥ 2 seconds of laughter manifested through words but without a distinguishing vocal variation, or a non-word sound, heard. They were 13F6.12, 13F6.13, 14F3.6, 14F3.14, 15F5.8, 15F10.13, 16F9.22, 16F9.23, and 16F9.24. Specific details for each of these humor-rhetoric moments are reported and available in Appendix A (which is also available online at: http://bit.ly/ntuphd_Appendix).
12F8.14 is an example of how humor-rhetoric was denoted by the semiotic play of audio co-occurring with the semiotic play of language and the semiotic play of visuals. 12F6.3 is an example of how humor-rhetoric was denoted without the semiotic play of audio. Overall, perceiving a play in meaning(s) because of the audio sound (i.e. vocal variations and non-word sounds) mostly enabled the manifestation of laughter. From the compiled results in Table 5.1 and in Appendix A, 235 of the 262 humor-rhetoric moments (i.e. 89.7%) were denoted by a semiotic play in audio signifiers. Only 27 humor-rhetoric moments (i.e. 10.3%) were not preceded by the play in audio signifiers (i.e. vocal variation and/or non-word sounds).

Summarizing the Forms of Semiotic Play that Denoted Humor-Rhetoric

Notably, there was no form of humor-rhetoric that manifested with only the semiotic play of Audio (i.e. non-word sounds and/or vocal variations). This is explainable as animated visuals were often observed to co-occur when non-word sounds triggered laughter, such as in 13F9.7: https://youtu.be/nMhS3MbJZeU?t=122 when the peculiar non-word sound of tire-changing co-occurred with the animated image of the speaker rotating an imaginary jack to change an imaginary tire. When the hearing of vocal variations triggered laughter, the semiotic play of words often co-occurred too, such as in 15F10.2: https://youtu.be/1aM5-l-fcCc when the sound of agitation/defiance co-occurred with the speaker saying the word (or sound-image) “what”.

The audio modality is, nonetheless, crucial for the manifestation of rhetorical humor. The crux of whether words used can be rhetorically humorous often depends on the vocal variation in which they are said. Playing with and varying the tone, pitch, pace, volume, emotions in voice, and the accent of words are important to produce humor.
in rhetoric. The combinative play of sounds, images, and sound-images, which corresponds to the integrative play of the Audio, Visual, and Language semiotic modes, was the most predominant form of semiotic play that produced humor in rhetoric. Laughter was most often elicited by the semiotic interplay of Language + Visual + Audio. The simultaneous play of language words, visual images, and audio sounds triggered rhetorical laughter 225 times. This meant that in 85.8% of the 262 humor-rhetoric moments recorded, language signifiers, visual signifiers and audio signifiers simultaneously denoted the manifestation of rhetorical humor.

All of the tangible language, visual, and audio observations in the 262 humor-rhetoric moments are documented in Appendix A. By denoting the overt, physical signifiers used in rhetorical humor, trails of evidence are available to be used to interpret what is covertly connoted (i.e. Technique, Target, Appeal) and signified by the sign of laughter.

5.5 Analyzing Technique [What?]
Analyzing the mechanism of Technique is directed by the inquiry: “What technique most strikingly generated the rhetorical humor? How so?”

40 of the 41 audiovisual humor techniques catalogued by Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004) generated the 262 humor-rhetoric moments. ‘Conceptual Surprise’, ‘Exaggeration’, and ‘Irony’ were the three techniques most frequently used by WCPS® speakers to generate rhetorical humor. Correspondingly, this meant that what prevalently generated humor-rhetoric was when a speaker distinctly communicated an unexpected change in meaning, overstated situations, and said one
thing to mean something else. The technique of ‘Peculiar Music’ was however the least frequent technique utilized and was the only audiovisual humor technique of Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004)’s taxonomy not observed in this dataset. This is because all WCPS® speakers communicated with only the audio output of their voice in the 57 speeches analyzed; no WCPS® speaker in this dataset brought musical instruments (such as a guitar, violin, or any other musical accompaniment) to produce peculiar music that resulted in audience laughter during a speech. Table 5.16 summarizes the report on how 40 different techniques distinctly generated the 262 humor as rhetoric moments. The filter-enabled function in Online Appendix A (i.e. http://bit.ly/ntuphd_Appendix) also allows each technique to be sorted by alphabetical order to view the specific details of how each technique generated humor-rhetoric moments.

Table 5.16: How the Variable of Technique Generated the 262 Humor-Rhetoric Moments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ordering</th>
<th>Humor Technique</th>
<th>Description of Humor Technique as defined by Buijzen &amp; Valkenburg (2004, p. 153-154)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Conceptual Surprise</td>
<td>Misleading the audience by means of a sudden unexpected change of concept</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Exaggeration</td>
<td>Making an exaggeration or overstatement; reacting in an exaggerated way; exaggerating the qualities of a person or product</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Irony</td>
<td>Saying one thing and meaning something else or exactly the opposite of what you’re saying</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Embarrassment</td>
<td>An awkward situation in which someone gets a sense of discomfort, uneasiness, or shame</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Repartee</td>
<td>Verbal banter, usually in a witty dialogue</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Satire</td>
<td>Making a fool of or poking fun at well-known things, situations, or public figures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ignorance</td>
<td>Someone acts or behaves in a foolish, naive, gullible, or childish manner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Puns</td>
<td>Playing with the meaning of words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Slapstick</td>
<td>Physical pie-in-the-face humor, often involving degradation of someone’s status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Malicious Pleasure</td>
<td>Taking pleasure in other people’s misfortune; victim humor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Stereotype</td>
<td>Stereotyped or generalized way of depicting members of a certain nation, gender, or other group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Misunderstanding</td>
<td>Misinterpreting a situation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Sarcasm</td>
<td>Biting remark made with a hostile tone; sarcasm is always a verbal put-down</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Clumsiness</td>
<td>Lacking dexterity or grace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Coincidence</td>
<td>A coincidental and unexpected occurrence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Irreverent Behavior</td>
<td>Lacking proper respect for authority or the prevailing standards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ridicule</td>
<td>Making a fool of someone, verbally or nonverbally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Outwitting</td>
<td>Outsmarting someone or the establishment by retort, response, or comeback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Imitation</td>
<td>Mimicking or copying someone’s appearance or movements, while keeping one’s own identity at the same time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td>Repetition or replay of the same situation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Clownish Behavior</td>
<td>Making vigorous arm and leg movements or demonstrating exaggerated, irregular physical behavior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Disappointment</td>
<td>A situation that leads to (minor) disappointment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>Someone or something takes on another form or undergoes a metamorphosis; before/after</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Parody</td>
<td>Imitating a style or a genre of literature or other media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Bombast</td>
<td>Talking in a high-flown, grandiloquent, or rhetorical manner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Rigidity</td>
<td>Someone who thinks along straight lines, who is conservative and inflexible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Visual Surprise</td>
<td>A sudden unexpected visual/physical change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Peculiar Face</td>
<td>Making a funny face or grimace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Chase</td>
<td>A pursuit or chase of someone or something</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>Very large or small sizes of objects that surpass people’s logical expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Absurdity</td>
<td>Nonsense, a situation that goes against all logical rules</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Impersonation</td>
<td>Taking on the identity of another person, intentionally or unintentionally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Eccentricity</td>
<td>Someone who deviates from the norms, an odd character</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Sexual Allusion</td>
<td>Making a reference or insinuation to sexual or naughty matters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Anthropomorphism</td>
<td>Objects or animals with human features</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Infantilism</td>
<td>Playing with the sound of words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Grotesque Appearance</td>
<td>Someone who has a bizarre or monstrous appearance with striking features</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Speed</td>
<td>Talking or moving in very fast or slow motion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Peculiar Sound</td>
<td>Funny sound or unexpected sound, as in cartoons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although the variable of technique distinctively generated laughter, three themes across all techniques were observed to commonly generate all laughter moments. The three basic means that emerged to broadly generate humor-rhetoric were (i) play with meanings, (ii) appropriate incongruity, and (iii) wit in mockery. I use five examples that on their own exemplify the distinctive techniques of ‘Conceptual Surprise’, ‘Exaggeration’, ‘Irony’, ‘Embarrassment’, and ‘Ignorance’ to illustrate.

**Conceptual Surprise VS Exaggeration VS Irony VS Embarrassment VS Ignorance**

First in terms of frequency occurrence were 22 examples of laughter moments in this dataset that were most strikingly generated by the technique of ‘Conceptual Surprise’. One exemplifying example is **17F6.5** (please see:  

[https://youtu.be/pDedhjlQWCg?t=40](https://youtu.be/pDedhjlQWCg?t=40)).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which resulted in a laughter moment. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
<th>What Technique distinctively generated Laughter?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17F6.5</td>
<td>Madame Contest Master, my fellow Toastmasters and communicators, growing up, I had a lot of babysitters which either means that a lot of people like to hang out with me or that my parents really didn’t. But my favorite babysitter was named Kelly, and after years of me teaching Kelly how to be</td>
<td>‘Conceptual Surprise’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
compassionate, and how to be patient, and how to serve others. \{Audience laughed between 1 to 2 seconds, under 17F6.4\}, she decided to venture into a new career path that was less challenging, and she became a nun. [Declarative tone] \{Audience laughed for ≥ 2 seconds\}

The strategic means of ‘Conceptual Surprise’ is specified as “Misleading the audience by means of a sudden unexpected change of concept” (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004, p. 153). Most distinctively, 17F6.5 was generated by a ‘Conceptual Surprise’ in the career path that Kelly suddenly embarked on. Kelly becoming a nun is an unexpected change of concept given that, just prior, 17F6 led us to view Kelly in the conceptual image of a compassionate babysitter.

17F6.5 was also broadly generated by the basic means of (i) play with meanings, (ii) appropriate incongruity, and (iii) wit in mockery. The meanings of being a nun and a babysitter were played with; 17F6 communicates non-seriously that being a career nun is a lesser challenge to the meanings of compassion, patience, and service which a babysitter can learn. It is also appropriately incongruent that Kelly decided to be a nun, given that she is first appropriately described as “compassionate” and “patient” in serving others. To elaborate, if the Language punchline was switched to ‘she became a librarian’, it would be appropriately incongruent too; but if Kelly suddenly became a wall-street banker, it would be inappropriately incongruent for the prior rhetoric. The career venture into being a wall-street banker is generally deemed to be
more challenging than that of a babysitter. Also, 17F6 displayed wit (i.e. the capacity to use words and ideas in a quick and inventive manner) in mocking Kelly, the babysitter profession and/or the career path of a nun.

Second in terms of frequency occurrence were 16 examples of laughter moments in this dataset that were most strikingly generated by the technique of ‘Exaggeration’. One exemplifying example is 14F7.4 (please see: https://youtu.be/MtquM8Rh7cs?t=77).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which resulted in a laughter moment. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
<th>What Technique distinctively generated Laughter?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14F7.4</td>
<td>Mr. Contest Chair, my fellow flowers. I can remember the first time I broke. I was seventeen years old. I had already flunked high school and managed to get myself arrested. Now, I wasn’t afraid of the cops, but there was one person I was very afraid of and that was my mama. Raise your hand if you have an emotional mother. Let me see. Put them all together you get my mama. I can hear her scream outside the police station. Even the cops were afraid. {Audience laughed for ≥ 2 seconds}</td>
<td>‘Exaggeration’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The technique of ‘Exaggeration’ is specified as “Making an exaggeration or
overstatement; reacting in an exaggerated way; exaggerating the qualities of a person or product” (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004, p. 153). **14F7.4** was distinctively generated by 14F7 exaggerating the “emotional” qualities of his mother. 14F7 claimed that putting all the emotional mothers from the 3000+ audience at the 2014 WCPS® together equated to the emotionality of his mother such that her scream from outside the police station made the cops afraid. If the guiding definitions provided by Buijzen & Valkenburg (2004) are strictly applied, the technique of ‘Conceptual Surprise’ is less striking because the audience was not misled into thinking that the police cops would not be afraid before surprisingly becoming afraid suddenly. To decide on the Technique that most distinctly generated **14F7.4**, the technique of ‘Exaggeration’ was evaluated¹ to be the most striking Technique because 14F7 overstated beyond normal proportions the qualities of his mother.

As much as humor-rhetoric **14F7.4** was distinctly generated by the strategic means of ‘Exaggeration’, the broad means of (i) play with meanings, (ii) appropriate incongruity, and (iii) wit in mockery generated **14F7.4** as well. The normative meaning that cops should be brave was playfully challenged. It was also appropriately incongruent that the cops can be afraid of excessive emotionality. To elaborate, if the Language punchline was, “But the cops were unafraid”, the appropriate congruency would not facilitate laughter and if 14F7 said instead, “So the cops decided to retire in fear”, an inappropriate incongruency would not incite laughter when the incongruency is too far-fetched. 14F7 also displayed wit in mocking his mother and/or the police force who can be afraid due to screams.

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¹ Note that the evaluative Technique interpretation for **14F7.4** was made in discussion with two other Toastmasters members, as explained in the ending paragraphs of section 4.2.
Third in terms of frequency occurrence were 12 examples of laughter moments in this dataset that were most distinctively generated by the technique of ‘Irony’. One exemplifying example is 14F3.18 (please see: https://youtu.be/7GyV6tLsiA8?t=279).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which resulted in a laughter moment. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
<th>What Technique distinctively generated Laughter?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14F3.18</td>
<td>Prior relevant context: 14F3 explicitly said “I told you so” to Andy, his irresponsible and tardy roommate, at three different situations in the first two minutes of his speech.</td>
<td>‘Irony’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within 3 minutes, Mr. and Mrs. CSI started their investigation. It wasn't long till they found out that the pay I got in China was less than the taxes I paid in Australia. They worked out that I wasn’t a general manager; I was just being generally managed. All the time, I had planned, dream, and darn worked so hard to try to be up here, but the truth was, I wasn't even close. Now, my mum and dad are very loving and supportive people. So, they comforted me with four words, “I told you so” [Speaker spoke the four words slowly and affirmatively.] (Speaker counted-down with his four</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The strategic means of ‘Irony’ is specified as “Saying one thing and meaning something else, or exactly the opposite of what you’re saying” (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004, p. 153). In 14F3.18, the speaker said his parents “comforted” him but he meant that his parents did not comfort him because “I told you so” expresses displeasure to a person for not listening. Given that 14F3 explicitly said, “I told you so” three times prior in the earlier part of his speech to reproach his roommate for being irresponsible and tardy made the humor-rhetoric in 14F3.18 more ironically amusing when 14F3 is being reproached now with the same four words. To hear the punchline “I told you so” is not conceptually sudden to be surprising for the audience, given that this is their 4th time hearing this phrase during this speech. 14F3 was also not exaggerating the phrases and words that were stated in 14F3.18. Most strikingly, the technique of ‘Irony’ provoked the laughter moment.

The broad means of (i) play with meanings, (ii) appropriate incongruity, and (iii) wit in mockery were inherent in 14F3.18 as well. The meaning of parents being “very loving and supportive people” were played with. It is appropriately incongruent too when parents who love you reproach you as a way of support. If the punchline from the parents was, “I support you son” or “It is ok son”, the appropriate congruency would not be provocative of laughter, but if the punchline from the parents was, “I reproach you so”, the incongruity of parental love and support would now be less
appropriate to provoke laughter when the word “reproach” (even though it is more or less synonymous with the word “told” in this context) does not wittily sync with the prior rhetoric. 14F3 was also being mocked at by his parents when his parents are (perceived to be) witty, clever, and smart to apply his pet advice to others back onto him. However, from an opposite standpoint, it is analyzed that 14F3 can also be covertly mocking his parents supposed ‘love’, ‘support’, ‘comfort’ in a passive-aggressive and sophisticated manner, masked via jokes which are not to be taken seriously. The plausibility that 14F3’s humor-rhetoric is potentially targeting his parents (more so than himself for mockery) has weight in reasoning when the transcript that follows immediately after 14F3.18 read, “**Told you** how to quit your job son. **I told you so!** **Told you** not to waste your time son. **I told you so.** For the rest of the week, *that’s all I heard* and by the time my mum and dad went home. They took with them Chairman Mao statues, some fortune cookies, and more importantly: my pride and confidence. I went home that day and I felt like a loser.”

Fourth in terms of frequency occurrence were 11 examples of laughter moments in this dataset that were most strikingly generated by the technique of ‘Embarrassment’. One exemplifying example is **14F2.18** (please see: https://youtu.be/wuy4htAu334?t=228).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which resulted in a laughter moment. The context before the <strong>Language, (Visual), [Audio]</strong> punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
<th>What Technique <strong>distinctively</strong> generated Laughter?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>14F2.18</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘Embarrassment’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prior relevant context: 14F2 was having a family vacation at a 7-days Caribbean cruise ship. 14F2
said that she and her two teenage daughters changed into their swimsuits and were at the pool.

The girls rushed over to me and handed me a robe. They said, “Mommy, we signed you up for the **swimsuit competition**.” They gave me two thumbs up and ran back to the internet café. I hear the announcer say, “All the contestants! Put on your robes and come on down to the staging area” I ran to the stage looking straight ahead. Number one, because I was a little nervous. Number two, I was afraid to check out my competition. We stood there and then the announcer says: “On the count of three, all the contestants drop your robes!” The audience began to count: “One! Two! Three!” Everyone laughed. My daughters started snapping pictures with their cellphone. So, I suck in my stomach, “Take the pic.” Then I hear, “Welcome to the hairy chest competition” [Speaker playacted the voice of an enthusiastic host doing a welcome announcement] (Speaker playacted to be the host and held an imaginary microphone, animatedly moving around) {Audience laughed for ≥ 2000ms, under **14F2.17, analyzed to be generated by the technique of ‘Conceptual Surprise’**}
Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004) specified the humor technique of ‘Embarrassment’ as “An awkward situation in which someone gets a sense of discomfort, uneasiness, or shame” (p. 153). In 14F2.18, speaker 14F2 is pertinently that someone who is in an awkward situation and her sense of discomfort, uneasiness, or shame is amusing for an audience. When 14F2 reverted from the playact role of an announcer to being herself, she visually communicated her discomfort, uneasiness, and shame by immediately covering her chest with both of her hands. By gushing out loud four times, 14F2 appears to be shocked and embarrassed by the awkward situation she suddenly finds herself in. To not be shocked or uneasy when a lady abruptly realizes that she is in a hairy chest competition would be an understatement of emotional expression. As such, the technique of ‘Exaggeration’ was deemed to be not most striking in humor-rhetoric 14F2.18. Additionally, because the audience was interpreted to be already conceptually surprised in 14F2.17 by the words of “hairy chest competition”, it is reasonable to interpret that 14F2.18 was not generated by
the technique of ‘Conceptual Surprise’ for a consecutive double-surprise when the audience was distinctively surprised by 14F2’s visual and audio reactions upon reverting to being herself. The visual signifiers and audio signifiers by 14F2 in 14F2.18 were not distinctively ironic too. 14F2 meant what she visually and auditorily communicated.

Although the humor technique of ‘Embarrassment’ was distinctively inherent in 14F2.18, the basic mechanisms of (i) play with meanings, (ii) appropriate incongruity, and (iii) wit in mockery were latent in 14F2.18 as well. To elaborate, the normative meaning that daughters should not play a prank on their mother was forsaken for fun’s sake. The normative meaning that one should not publicly show shock and shame when one is posing on stage during an image-based competition was also playfully contradicted. Speaker 14F2 was behaving incongruently to the norms expected at a “hairy chest competition”. However, her behavioral incongruity is appropriate since she genuinely thought that she was at a “swimsuit competition” right until that point in time. Most obviously, 14F2 was the target for mockery in 14F2.18. Her quick actions to immediately cover her chest and gush out loudly demonstrated wit in story-telling. It would not be witty of 14F2 to convey embarrassment by plainly saying words such as, “I felt embarrassed and was shocked”. Instead, 14F2 was inventive with her non-verbal actions, gestures and auditory sounds to escalate more laughter at her humiliation. The keen intelligence that 14F2 displayed in how to be amusing for laughter is representative of wit in how she mocked her predicament that she ridiculously fell into.

Next, there were 10 examples of laughter moments in this dataset that were most
strikingly generated by the technique of ‘Ignorance’. One exemplifying example is 16F10.6 (please see: https://youtu.be/F5K4qR9Pm3M?t=198 for a concise context and https://youtu.be/F5K4qR9Pm3M?t=111 for a more extensive context).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which resulted in a laughter moment. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
<th>What Technique distinctly generated Laughter?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16F10.6</td>
<td>In my living room, I have a chess set that my parents brought me from Greece and each piece is depicted by a different Greek mythological god or goddess. I have this set proudly displayed on the chess table that my grandmother refinished herself over 50 years ago. My older son knows not to go near that chess set. My younger son knows not to go near that chess set. My husband knows not to go near that chess set. One evening I hear this huge crash and then something worse. Silence. I come careening down the living-room stairs to see my youngest son lying on the floor amongst the slew of decapitated Greek gods. Funny sentence. Not such a funny scene. Did you hit your head? Can you feel your toes? Tell me, I need to know what happened. It took a lot more prodding and begging on my part before he finally admits that he was trying to slide down the staircase banister, lost his balance halfway through, and hit his head on the banister.</td>
<td>‘Ignorance’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
down, and plummeted directly into the porcelain laps of Zeus and Medusa.

Although he's unharmed, he continues to sob and he gets out, “Look, mommy mommy, I broke your, I broke your, chess set.” In his little boy mind, he mistook my panic for anger. **Not that I can blame the kid.** [Speaker spoke casually.] (Speaker strolled away, looked back and smiled.) {Audience laughed for ≥ 2000ms}

Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004) specified the humor technique of ‘Ignorance’ as “Someone acts or behaves in a foolish, naive, gullible, or childish manner” (p. 153). In **16F10.6**, that ignorant ‘someone’ who is ‘foolish’, ‘naïve’, ‘gullible’, or ‘childish’ to be mocked at in laughter was the speaker’s son. 16F10’s son was sobbing when he broke 16F10’s chess set and he mistook 16F10’s panic for anger. When 16F10 stated that she could not blame this on the ignorance of her youngest son, the audience responded with audible laughter for a prolonged duration.

The wit by 16F10 in how she mocked her son with her sharp quip broadly generated the laughter moment. **16F10.6** is also broadly generated by the appropriate incongruity that is communicated. To appear to be in anger when one is professedly in panic is appropriately incongruent. Deciphering the meaning of whether the kid is to be blamed is in play too. As much as her son can be blamed for breaking her
cherished chess set, he cannot be blamed for being ignorant of the nuance in her emotional display.

Among the five specified definitions of ‘Conceptual Surprise’, ‘Exaggeration’, ‘Irony’, ‘Embarrassment’, and ‘Ignorance’, the humor technique of ‘Ignorance’ most distinctively generated 16F10.6. 16F10 was not misleading in expectations such that a laugh is conceptually surprised by a mother not blaming her kid. “Not that I can blame the kid” is also not an overstatement which exaggerates the literal content. 16F10 was also not saying one thing and meaning something else for irony to generate laughter. Someone’s ignorance, rather than someone’s embarrassment, more distinctly provoked the laughter in 16F10.6.

Summarizing the Generators of Rhetorical Humor
The communicative means, in terms of Technique, that most strikingly generated rhetorical humor for the audience to laugh for $\geq 2000$ms was analyzed. There were at least 40 different strategic means that distinctly generated laughter. I spotlighted five of the more prevalent techniques in the present report. What emerged to commonly generate all laughter moments are the broad means of wit in mockery, appropriate incongruity, and play with meanings (which are further discussed in section 6.5). There are differences in the distinctive techniques to generate laughter, but also commonalities.

5.6 Analyzing Target [Whom?] Analyzing the variable of Target is directed by the inquiry: “Whom did the rhetorical humor, most strikingly, target? How so did laughter arise from jabs at
people, groups, or ideas?"

The targets of rhetorical humor were mostly people. 210 of the 262 humor-rhetoric moments (i.e. 80.2%) were people-targeted jabs. The target of the humor-rhetoric was most commonly jabbing at the speaker, with a frequency count of 104 (i.e. 39.7%). Apart from rhetorical humor that was self-directed, humor-rhetoric moments also jabbed at another specified person (n = 47), at specified people (n = 20), at the audience (n = 6), at the micro-relationships between/among people (n = 22), and at people at a macro-level (n = 11). The breakdown of the 210 people-targeted jabs into these 6 categorial targets of people is shown in Table 5.17. The remainder of the humor-rhetoric moments were, however, non-people targeted jabs (n = 52). In these 52 moments of laughter, the rhetorically humorous content was not aggressive towards a specified someone, or to people in general; they were most strikingly jabbing at ideas (such as: “a car doing push-ups”, “a dollar-bill chuckling”, and a “spiritual retreat” “called Burger King”) for the audience to laugh about ideas. The filter-enabled function of Online Appendix A (see: http://bit.ly/ntuphd_Appendix) allows each categorial target to be sorted according to alphabetical order to view all the examples in each category.

Table 5.17: The Targets of Rhetorical Humor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People-Targeted = 210</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Laughter about the speaker</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Laughter about another specified person</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Laughter about specified people</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Laughter about the “Speaker”

In the 262 manifestations of rhetorical humor during the 57 WCPS® speeches, 104 of the humor-rhetoric moments were targeted at the speaker. Examples of laughter about the speaker are evident in 16F8.8 (see: https://youtu.be/m3FzOljTgtU?t=191) when there was laughter about the speaker’s ability to talk, in 13F3.8 (see: https://youtu.be/15Yn8ZGtdk0?t=246) when there was laughter about the speaker’s prayer, and in 13F7.12 (see: https://youtu.be/KNi87jGi5PU?t=294) when there was laughter about the speaker’s face being peppered sprayed. Humor-rhetoric moments that targeted the speaker to result in laughter about the speaker are also evident in 14F8.13 (see: https://youtu.be/asw8jtcjW6o?t=163) when there was laughter about the speaker who described himself as ‘hot’, and in 13F6.14 (https://youtu.be/skrbJefJ1q94?t=307) when there was laughter about the speaker’s persistence in waiting. 99 more examples of how rhetorical humor targeted the speaker to result in laughter about the speaker are available in Appendix A.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which resulted in a laughter moment. The context before the <strong>Language, (Visual), [Audio]</strong> punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
<th>Categorical Target?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16F8.8</td>
<td>I've always been called a quiet person. In fact, if you went back in time to my college and told the other students, that one day Aaron Beverly will speak in front of over a thousand people at a Toastmasters convention, they will say, &quot;Wow that's amazing! <strong>Aaron can talk?!</strong>&quot; [The speaker said the language punchline in a squeaky, rising pitch](Speaker frowned his eyebrows and moved his eyebrows up and down quickly. Speaker was observed to have blinked his eyes rapidly in puzzlement.)</td>
<td><strong>Speaker</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13F3.8</td>
<td>Have you ever made a bargain with God? I prayed. Lord, if you get me through this alive, I swear <strong>I'll never eat chocolate again</strong> (Knees on the ground. Hands clasped together in a prayer position) [Desperation in voice, pleading tone]</td>
<td><strong>Speaker</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13F7.12</td>
<td>[Speaker described how his drill instructor instructed him to pick up his smile, but he is unable to.</td>
<td><strong>Speaker</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 197 |
something that I will never forget. **He peppered** sprayed my face! [Speaker made a spraying sound shhh... ...] (Speaker shut his eyes tightly and jumped around)

| 14F8.13 | **Do we own our devices, or do they own us?** What happened to those days of handshakes, hugs, and face-to-face communication. Those days when Apple was just a fruit. | **Speaker**

| 13F6.14 | So I did. (Speaker sat on the chair on stage) And I waited. Wooh hoo. I waited. I scanned the skies. I waited. And waited. | **Speaker**

| 13F2.6 | (Speaker accent on the word ‘Hot’.) (Speaker gave a beauty pageant pose, with hands on his hips and weight on one foot.) | **Speaker**

**Laughter about “Another Specified Person”**

47 of the 262 manifestations of rhetorical humor (i.e. 17.9%) were targeted at another specified person. Examples of laughter about a specified person, who is not the speaker, are evident in **13F2.6** (see: [https://youtu.be/B10QHaOTyIM?t=165](https://youtu.be/B10QHaOTyIM?t=165)) when there was laughter about “Adam” who was chasing his shadow, and in **13F3.11** (see:
https://youtu.be/15Yn8ZGtdk0?t=364) when there was laughter about the speaker’s “Dad” who had transformed to have less stinky feet. Laughter about a specified person, whom the speaker specified, are also evident in 12F1.7 (see: https://youtu.be/cxztd-iEomI?t=210) when there was laughter about the speaker’s “father”, in 17F6.14 (see: https://youtu.be/pDedhjlQWCg?t=403) when there was laughter about the speaker’s “daughter”, and in 16F10.6 (see: https://youtu.be/F5K4qR9Pm3M?t=198) when there was laughter about “the kid”. 42 more examples of how rhetorical humor targeted a specified someone, who is not the speaker, to result in laughter about “Another Specified Person” are available in Appendix A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which resulted in a laughter moment. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
<th>Categorical Target? [Whom]</th>
<th>Person-Specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13F2.6</td>
<td><strong>Adam</strong> was picking up stones and twigs (Speaker takes a stone and a twig from the stage-chair). Chasing after flies (pretends to throw the stone at ‘flies’). Chasing after lizards (throws the stone at ‘lizards’) and even (slams the twig onto the floor, runs away, before moving back to look at the spot where he threw the twig) <strong>his shadow</strong>. [Puzzlement in voice]</td>
<td>[Whom]</td>
<td>“Adam”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13F3.11</td>
<td>[Speaker mentioned that her Dad has very stinky feet in the first minute of her presentation.</td>
<td>Dad looked like a wet dog now. [Warmth in voice] Hair and clothes plastered to his body. On a positive note, <strong>his feet didn’t stink.</strong> [Speaker spoke sharply.] (Speaker was smiling for upper teeth to be seen throughout, eyebrows were raised)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12F1.7</td>
<td>Age 23 I was at work and I received a call from my father. He doesn’t even say hello. Andrew, I need your help and don’t laugh. I have something here. I'm going to read it out to you. <strong>Tell me what it is. H. T. T. P.</strong> [Fierce voice] (Face was progressively frowning more)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17F6.14</td>
<td>[Speaker was telling the story of how his infant daughter, Jane, learned to speak, after initial developmental difficulties.</td>
<td>She was learning that she had a voice. And I ran to her [Speaker spoke in excitement] and I picked her up and I said, say it with me Jane, 1, ah, 2, ooh, 3. (Speaker threw Jane up in the air.) [Speaker spoke with a tone of assurance.] And since that night, I have not been able to shut her up.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16F10.6</td>
<td>The speaker’s young son broke the speaker’s chess set because he was playful in trying to slide down the staircase banister and lost his balance. Although he's unharmed, he continues to sob, and he lets out. “Look, mommy mommy, I broke your, I broke your, chess set.” In his little boy mind, he mistook my panic for anger. Not that I can blame the kid. [Speaker spoke casually.] (Speaker strolled away, looked back and smiled.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Person-Specific
- “the kid” (i.e. speaker’s son)

---

**Laughter about “Specified People”**

20 of the 262 humor-rhetoric moments (i.e. 7.6%) were targeted at the categorial group of “Specified People”. Examples of laughter about specified people are evident in **16F4.7** (see: [https://youtu.be/hkjizhGTQbU?t=176](https://youtu.be/hkjizhGTQbU?t=176)) when there was laughter about “men” in general, in **13F2.3** (see: [https://youtu.be/BloQHaOTvIM?t=90](https://youtu.be/BloQHaOTvIM?t=90)) when there was laughter about “women” in general and in **17F2.1** (see: [https://youtu.be/mm4EUqoIFYU?t=68](https://youtu.be/mm4EUqoIFYU?t=68)) when there was laughter about “kids” in general. Laughter about people, whom the speaker specified, are also evident in **16F5.11** (see: [https://youtu.be/b1EaY2OdGSs?t=128](https://youtu.be/b1EaY2OdGSs?t=128)) when there was laughter about “bullies” who “always felt the need to” tell the bullied how they will be bullied, in **16F5.18** (see: [https://youtu.be/b1EaY2OdGSs?t=382](https://youtu.be/b1EaY2OdGSs?t=382)) when there was laughter about “leaders” who are bullies, and in **15F10.8** (see: [https://youtu.be/yV-SaF-GiJk?t=81](https://youtu.be/yV-SaF-GiJk?t=81)) when there was laughter about the two people who started smoking. 14 more
examples of how rhetorical humor targeted specified people to result in laughter about people, whom the speaker specified, are available in Appendix A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which resulted in a laughter moment. The context before the <strong>Language, (Visual), [Audio]</strong> punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
<th>Categorical Target?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16F4.7</td>
<td><strong>Men</strong> are never lost. <strong>They merely find themselves in unexpected places</strong> [Speaker said ‘unexpected places’ in a higher pitch, with a different tonality.] (Speaker was smiling.)</td>
<td>Specified People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Women</strong>. Everything of theirs is W. Wives and Widows. They are also welcoming, warm-hearted, wise. <strong>But also … Wicked</strong> [Cheekiness in voice] (Smiles and looks down)</td>
<td>Specified People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13F2.3</td>
<td>(Speaker began her speech by opening her palms out and raising her hand up.) <strong>By a show of hands, how many of you were kids</strong> when you were growing up [Tone observed was friendly and trustable] (Speaker smiled)</td>
<td>Specified People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17F2.1</td>
<td>[Speaker was telling how he was being bullied in school.</td>
<td>Ever wondered why <strong>bullies</strong> always felt the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16F5.11</td>
<td></td>
<td>Specified People</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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need to tell you the exact sequence they're gonna bully you (Speaker gestured an imaginary list.)

[Speaker varied his pitch of speaking. A tone of mockery was observed to have been conveyed in his voice.] (Speaker bend his knees and rolled his shoulders forward, while frowning his eyebrows to look puzzled.)

| 16F5.18 | [Speaker was describing that he met his childhood bully at Toastmasters. | Since when did a Toastmasters Logo turn from: “Where Leaders Are Made” to where bullies are made? | Specified People – “Leaders” |

I used these arguments, even though I just made them up, to a group of my friends and the results: Five of them believed what I said. Two of them started smoking. [Speaker spoke affirmatively.] (Speaker gestured with two fingers.)

| 15F10.8 | Specified People – “Two of them” | | |

203
Laughter about “The Audience”

Rhetorical humor targeted at “The Audience” is a subset of the preceding categorial group, “Specified People”, but is also regarded as a distinctive category in the classification of people-targeted jabs for this study. “The Audience” was a distinctive group of “Specified People” being targeted for laughter. A total of 6 humor-rhetoric moments were targeted specifically at “The Audience” to result in laughter about the audience. Laughter about the audience was observed in 16F5.7 (see: https://youtu.be/b1EaY2OdGSs?t=81) when there was laughter by the audience about themselves for “staring” and “looking at Calvin Klein”, in 14F8.10 (see: https://youtu.be/asw8jtqjW6o?t=121) when there was laughter by the audience about themselves for taking their smartphones into “the bathroom”, and in 14F3.26 (see: https://youtu.be/7GyV6tLsiA8?t=417) when there was laughter by the audience about the audience who “got up late and that’s why you’re sitting up there”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which resulted in a laughter moment.</th>
<th>Categorical Target?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16F5.7</td>
<td>Mr. Contest Chair, fellow Toastmasters, and anyone including those watching worldwide: If you are looking at Calvin Klein here, stop staring! (Speaker was staring at the audience.) [Speaker spoke sharply to the audience.]</td>
<td>The Audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td>The Audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14F8.10</td>
<td>[Speaker was lamenting about smartphones, labeling smartphones as aliens.</td>
<td>When did these aliens take us over? Some folks even take them to the bathroom and you know who you are. [Speaker accented on the word &quot;bathroom&quot;.] (Speaker playfully pointed at the audience several times.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14F3.26</td>
<td>Sometimes, being right isn't always right. [Speaker spoke with certainty and deliberately paused.] So now, whenever I get frustrated or angry with the people around me, and the next time you get frustrated or angry with the people around you. Maybe they've shopped too many times at KLCC. Maybe they got up late and that's why you're sitting up there [Speaker spoke with some annoyance in his tone.] (Speaker pointed at the audience seated on the highest level up and away from the stage, before waving and smiling at them.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12F6.8</td>
<td>When I was 10 years old, I had a very good friend by the name of Andrew. Now, he was living my dream. [Speaker spoke with hostility] His father was rich. He had everything he wanted. The best toys. The best games. And he could go to Disneyland Orlando without competing in a speech</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
contest (Speaker pointed at the audience, with a gun-shot gesture) [Speaker spoke with agitation]

When did you scratch another person? Because your life wasn't going well, or your life was going too well? A loved one, a friend, or even in this convention? A sergeant-at-arms wouldn't allow you to get in because you came in late. [Speaker accented on the word "you" and spoke with righteousness.] (Speaker stared at and pointed at the audience.)

The Audience

In humor-rhetoric 12F6.8 (see: https://youtu.be/plH8IfhHrqU?t=105), the laughter being about the audience was not obvious. On the surface, it is directly observable the audience laughed for ≥ 2000ms regarding going to “Disneyland Orlando without competing in a speech contest”. However, beneath the surface of what is directly observable, whom did the audience most strikingly laugh about? The person, whom the audience is laughing about, can possibly be Andrew going to “Disneyland Orlando without competing in a speech contest” at least 20 years ago¹ in 1992. The target of laughter can also be about the audience going to “Disneyland Orlando without competing in a speech contest” in 2012. The 2012 WCPS® was held at the Hilton Bonnet Creek Resort, which was a 5 minutes’ drive from Disneyland

¹ This is a reasonable inference because 12F6 is upwards of 30 years old and he was recounting his childhood story when he was 10 years old, in the year 1992 or before.
Orlando, and 12F6 was speaking to a sitting audience of 1500+ people. The interpretation that the audience of 1500+ is laughing about themselves being able to go to “Disneyland Orlando without competing in a speech contest” is more likely.

Laughter about the audience was also latent in 15F8.15 (see: https://youtu.be/tYsA_gwSpiI?t=317) when there was laughter about being barred from entry during a speech because “you came in late”. It is reasonable to suppose that the subject of “you” was not referring to a specified person, but was referring to the audience in general. The speaker also pointed at the audience and stared at the audience when he said the language punchline, “you came in late”. 15F8 was speaking to an audience of at least 1500+ at a Las Vegas Casino Hotel. The subjected target in 15F8.15 is most likely about the audience who came in late. There was laughter by the audience about the audience who came in late.

Among the 6 humor-rhetoric moments that were targeted at the audience, the most interesting example was in 13F9.29 (see: https://youtu.be/nMhS3MbhZcU?t=357) when there was laughter by the audience about themselves for their laughing in the preceding laughter moment (i.e. 13F9.28). As indicated in the accompanying boxes below, which are cutout excerpts of Appendix A, 13F9.28 arose from the punchline “Maybe you want better tire-changing skills, reach out to me”. The audience laughed for > 2 seconds (at the speaker) because they think that the speaker cannot help in tire-changing. When the audience was still laughing, the speaker motioned at the audience to stop laughing before taking out a card while saying the punchline, “I’ll give you Jesse’s number”. It is directly observable that the audience reacted with louder sounds of laughter, as well as applause. For humor-rhetoric 13F9.29, it is
inferred that there was laughter by the audience at themselves when they realized that their previous laughter at the speaker's self-recommendation was premature. The speaker can actually help in tire-changing when he has the connection to recommend others to help you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which resulted in a laughter moment. The context before the <strong>Language, (Visual), [Audio]</strong> punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
<th>Categorical Target? [Whom]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>13F9.29</strong></td>
<td>The speaker illustrated, with extended details, how incompetent he was in tire-changing. When he eventually asked for help, Jesse (a man who he met at a gas station) easily changed his tire and lifted his car up. He explained that it is important to reach out to others for help.</td>
<td>The Audience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Maybe you want a better voice, reach out to a singer. Maybe you want better writing, reach out to a writer. **Maybe you want better tire-changing skills, reach out to me.** {Audience laughed for > 2 seconds, under 13F9.28, due to the irony presented; the speaker is incompetent in tire-changing. There was laughter by the audience because they think that the speaker cannot help in tire-changing.}
(Speaker motioned at the audience to stop laughing, before taking out a card.) I will give you Jesse's number [Speaker accented on "Jesse's number" with a vocal variation.] (Speaker nodded his head 6 times.) {Audience laughed and applauded for > 2 seconds. There was laughter by the audience at themselves when they realized that their previous laughter at the speaker's self-recommendation was premature. The speaker can actually help in tire-changing when he has the connection to recommend others to help you.}

Producing a humor-rhetoric that involves “The Audience” being the target of laughter is rare, relative to the 104 times that “The Speaker” was the target of laughter. I scrutinized the 262 humor-rhetoric moments closely, reviewing them multiple times on multiple occasions for what was most precisely the target of laughter. There were only 6 examples out of 262 that I can index as laughter about the audience for ≥ 2 seconds.

As much as targeting “The Audience” for laughter is atypical, it does not mean that provoking laughter about the audience is not a good manner to be rhetorically humorous. The example highlighted in 13F9.29 was the 29th and final time that 13F9 made the audience laugh before 13F9 spoke two more sentences and ended the speech that won him the 1st placing in the 2013 WCPS®. The other examples that
highlighted speakers targeting “The Audience” for laughter in 12F6.8, 14F4.26, 15F8.15, and 16F5.7, also corresponded with podium placings for the speaker. 12F6 won 2nd placing in the 2012 WCPS®, 14F4 won 2nd placing in the 2014 WCPS®, 15F8 won 2nd placing in the 2015 WCPS®, and 16F5 won 1st placing in the 2016 WCPS®. This is, however, likely to be coincidental. The discovered association that making the audience laugh about themselves is a good predictor of a podium placing is not qualitatively meaningful. Nevertheless, what remains true is that making the audience laugh about themselves for ≥ 2 seconds is refreshing and statistically unique. It is meaningful to make the audience laugh about themselves if it makes them feel more at ease and comfortable with themselves (in their imperfections). It is meaningful to make the audience laugh about themselves when it promotes interactive attention when “you” are now the subject-matter of laughter.

Laughter about the “Relationships” of People

22 of the 262 humor-rhetoric moments (i.e. 8.4%) were targeted at the relationships of people for the audience to laugh about relationships. In this target categorical group of “Relationships”, the audience was not laughing at an individual, themselves, or a group of people. The audience was laughing more specifically at the micro-relationships of people, such as spousal relationships, parent-son dynamics, and teacher-student relationships. Examples of humor-rhetoric moments jabbing at relationships were observed in 15F9.14 (see: https://youtu.be/SdoezCztJlk?t=192) when there was laughter about the spousal relationship the speaker had with his wife, in 14F3.8 (see: https://youtu.be/7GyV6tLsiA8?t=280) when there was laughter about the parent-son dynamics of the speaker with his “mum and dad”, and in 16F5.7 (see: https://youtu.be/8dcPMbtVbpA?t=307) when there was laughter about the teacher-
student relationship between “Mrs. M.” and “me”. Laughter about the relationships of people were also observed in 12F9.3 (see: https://youtu.be/f06ZAbVRWvE?t=21) when there was laughter about the micro-relational conflict among the speaker, his wife, and his mother-in-law, in 13F8.6 (see: https://youtu.be/SLxXAZ_uLNE?t=68) when there was laughter about the micro-relational conflict between the speaker and a car-chasing driver, and in 15F10.13 (see: https://youtu.be/yV-SaF-GiJk?t=185) when there was laughter about the micro-relational conflict between father and son. 16 more examples of how rhetorical humor targeted micro-relationships to result in laughter about the relationships of people are available in Appendix A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which resulted in a laughter moment. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
<th>Categorical Target?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15F9.14</td>
<td>Only after our marriage did I realized she was not only smart, she was also very hot. Tempered. Just like me. We had problems. She liked outdoors; I liked indoors. She loved swimming; I feared drowning. <strong>She liked cooking; I like to tell her how I miss my mama's cooking.</strong> [Speaker spoke affirmatively.] (Speaker nodded his head downwards and rolled his lips together.)</td>
<td>Relationship between people - “She” Vs “I” (Spousal relationship)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 14F3.18 | Now my **mum and dad** are very loving and supportive people. So, **they** comforted **me** with four words: **I told you so.** [Speaker spoke the four words slowly and affirmatively.] (Speaker counted-down with his four fingers while saying the four words of the language punchline, before smiling and nodding.) | Micro-Relationships of people
- **“Mum and Dad”**
- **Vs “Me”**
(Parent-son dynamics) |
| 15F3.8 | [Mrs. M was the speaker’s teacher. | Mrs. M true to her word gave **me** a crisp $100 bill and **bought me lunch** (Speaker gave a cheeky smile while raising his eyebrows.) [Speaker produced a clicking sound by clicking his tongue.] | Relationship between people
- **“Mrs. M” + “Me”**
(Teacher-student relationship) |
| 12F9.3 | When my very **pregnant wife** says, "We need to talk", it means she will be doing ALL of the talking. "To help **us** with the new baby, **my mother** has AGREED [Accentuating] to move in with **us."
[Haughty tone] (Speaker pretended that he was his wife. One hand on waist. The other hand waving a | Micro-Relational Conflict among people
- **“My Mother” + Speaker**
- **“Pregnant wife”** |
finger. Animated facial expressions were observed.)

(13F8.6) Of course, the guy started chasing me, because I had hurt his male ego. So, we started chasing each other around the traffic, going up and down, until he flashed his headlights. Oh no, he did not just do that! [Speaker spoke with anger.] (Speaker pointed left and right and pointed left and right again.)

Micro-Relational Conflict between people - “He” Vs “Me” in a car-chase

(15F10.13) Speaker was a father and he described a conflict he had with his son. He did it again just to spite me. A week later, I walked into his room and again, he's going at it. And this time he was even looking at me. [Speaker was observed to be speaking with his baseline tonality when he said, “he was even looking at me”.] (Speaker playacted ‘drawing’ circles on an imaginary wall and stared intensely in deviance.)

Micro-Relational Conflict between people - “He” Vs “Me” (Father-Son Relation)

Laughter about “People at a Macro-level” (e.g. institutions, society)

11 of the 262 humor-rhetoric moments were targeted at people at a macro-level (e.g. institutions and society) for the audience to laugh about people at a macro-level. This
included laughter about humans as a species, laughter about institutions, laughter about societal behaviors, and laughter about societal views. The target categorial group of “People at a Macro-level” is distinctive and differed from the first 5 categories of people-targeted rhetorical humor which were of laughter about people at the micro-level of individual being(s). Laughter about people at a macro-level was observed in **14F8.21** (see: [https://youtu.be/asw8jtcjW6o?t=380](https://youtu.be/asw8jtcjW6o?t=380)) when there was laughter about people/humans as a species, in **14F7.15** (see: [https://youtu.be/MtquM8Rh7cxs?t=304](https://youtu.be/MtquM8Rh7cxs?t=304)) when there was laughter about the institution of Toastmasters being a “strange club”, and in **12F2.3** (see: [https://youtu.be/DqZBHSPQ0_k?t=37](https://youtu.be/DqZBHSPQ0_k?t=37)) when there was laughter about “The British Empire”, which was an institution of governance. The macro-level jabbing at people was also observed in **16F2.11** (see: [https://youtu.be/8e4k29kErCe?t=363](https://youtu.be/8e4k29kErCe?t=363)) when the rhetorical humor jabbed at a societal behavior, and in **15F10.5** ([https://youtu.be/yV-SaF-GiJk?t=45](https://youtu.be/yV-SaF-GiJk?t=45)) when the rhetorical humor jabbed at a societal view. 6 more examples of how rhetorical humor targeted people at a macro-level (e.g. institutions and society), to result in ≥ 2 seconds of laughter, are available for viewing in Appendix A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which resulted in a laughter moment. The context before the <strong>Language</strong>, <strong>(Visual)</strong>, <strong>[Audio]</strong> punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
<th>Categorical Target? [Whom]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>14F8.21</strong></td>
<td>Speaker was recounting a letter that he wrote to his son, which included wanting him to keep kindling his intellectual curiosity.</td>
<td>People at a Macro-level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
goes and lays its eggs in another bird’s nest ... Find out why the female mantis bites off the head of its lover, right after mating! [Speaker spoke strongly and emphatically.] And why this happens in other species as well. (Speaker gestured at and pointed at the audience with both his index fingers.) (Speaker continued pointing at the audience for > 10 seconds.)

So, my dad introduced me to this strange club, that had a strange name, with strange people, talking [Speaker emphasized the word ‘strange’ through a different inflection of his voice.] (Speaker did the same visual of bending his knees, and circle-opening up his palms, each time he said the word ‘strange’.)

Statistically, you shouldn’t be here today. Your ancestors faced countless obstacles. War. Disease. The British Empire (Speaker pointed all of his 8 fingers and 2 thumbs at himself. [Speaker spoke passionately and had a natural-sounding British accent]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>16F2.11</th>
<th>Who needs them, I've got Pokémon [Speaker spoke with uninterest.] (Speaker took out his mobile phone.)</th>
<th>Societal Behavior - Playing Pokémon on mobile (which was a societal craze in August 2016)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15F10.5</td>
<td>Do you know that the amount of people dying from diabetes are three times as many people dying from smoking? Yet, if I pulled a snicker bar, nobody will say anything. [Speaker spoke with certainty] (Speaker frowned his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders.)</td>
<td>Societal Views - Eating a snicker bar is socially more acceptable than smoking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Laughter about Ideas
In this study, there were 52 humor-rhetoric moments categorized as non-person targeted jabs because these jabs were not aggressively targeted at people for laughter. In the examples when the rhetorical humor was not jabbing at someone, or at people, the rhetorical humor was jabbing at ideas. Examples of laughter about ideas are evident in 13F9.22 (see: https://youtu.be/nMhS3MbJZcU?t=247) about “a car doing push-ups”, in 15F4.10 (see: https://youtu.be/ZI3JoNoAh7g?t=199) about a “dollar bill” chuckling, and in 13F8.12 (see: https://youtu.be/SLXxAZ_uLNE?t=207) about a “spiritual retreat” called Burger King”. Laughter about ideas were also observed in 12F9.8 (see: https://youtu.be/f06ZAbVRWvE?t=105) when there was laughter about the idea of a “country music song” being associated with “a dog and an old pickup truck”, in 13F6.2 (see: https://youtu.be/skrbJfJ1q94?t=39) when there was laughter about the idea of “flocculence”, in 13F9.16 (see: https://youtu.be/nMhS3MbJZcU?t=195) when there was laughter about the polysemy of words (i.e. “gravity” which can mean “weight”, “gravitational force”, or “seriousness”) and in 15F2.3 (see: https://youtu.be/AJ15YPj2Vl0?t=361) when there was laughter about the polysemy of gestures (i.e. “the two-sign” which can mean “two” and be pronounced as “too”, and also signify “peace” or “victory”). 46 more examples of how rhetorical humor targeted at ideas to result in laughter about ideas are available for viewing in Appendix A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which resulted in a laughter moment.</th>
<th>Categorical Target?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13F9.22</td>
<td>The speaker was describing the difficulties he had</td>
<td>Idea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.
| 218 | in trying to change his car tire which was deflated. |
|     | In the gas station behind the counter, stood a big man with a big smile. Badge read: Jessie. He said, my friend, **was your car** (Speaker gestured his finger up and down rapidly) **doing push-ups**? [Blunt tone] |
| 15F4.10 | I went to the claw machine right next to Kyle's. I put in my first dollar bill. Out came the claw. It just missed! And the whole crowd went aww. I put in my second dollar bill. Out came the claw. It got jammed. And the whole crowd went aww. I **put in my final dollar bill**. And I swear I could hear George Washington **chuckle** and seeing him wave goodbye to me, on the way into that machine. [Speaker spoke with certainty and vigor] (Speaker pointed vigorously at the 'machine') |
| 13F8.12 | Why do I always look at people with dirty lenses? This incident actually repeated itself again at my **spiritual retreat** where I always go to meditate and reflect. It's called Burger King. [Speaker shouted out loud in excitement the words, “Burger King.”] (Speaker smiled widely and gestured a big burger right in front of her.) |
Back in 2002, within a 5-week period, I lost my job, my apartment, and my girlfriend. If I lost a dog and an old pickup truck, I would have had a country music song [Proudly declaring] (Open body posture with both palms up)

Imagine flying through a sky. You see a cloud so fluffy. You cannot wait to soar through its downy flocculence. Flocculence. [Speaker pronounced the word flocculence playfully] (Speaker raised his eyebrows and let out a cheeky smile before alternating back to look serious again.)

… Almost enough… Bang! The car had moved to a steeper slope. I grasped the gravity of the situation. [Speaker accentuated on “grasped the gravity”] (Speaker clenched his fist and pulled his downwards while saying that he “grasped the gravity of the situation”)

The ideas that the audience laughed about were wide-ranging to include laughter about a non-word sound, laughter about adjectives, and laughter about inanimate objects, among many. Unlike the classification of people-targeted jabs where six distinctive categories of laughter about humans emerged, sub-categories of non-

12F9.8
13F6.2
13F9.16
people targeted jabs were not indexed. It is possible to be more nuanced in analyzing the laughter about non-humans, but no useful sub-categories emerged within the dataset examples that are necessarily meaningful to justify categorical differentiation. For this study, laughter, when it is not aggressive towards specified humans, was catalogued under the wide umbrella of laughter about ideas.

**Summarizing the Targets of Rhetorical Humor**

The content of rhetorical humor most strikingly jabbed at a singular person (n = 151), groups of people (n = 59), and ideas (n = 52). There were people-targeted humor-rhetoric (n = 210), and non-people targeted humor-rhetoric (n = 52). Whom did the 262 humor-rhetoric moments jab at, in terms of distinctive categorial Targets, were the speaker (n = 104), another specified person (n = 47), specified people (n = 20), the audience (n = 6), the relationships of people (n = 22), people at a macro-level (n = 11), and ideas (n = 52). Analyzing whom each rhetorical humor targeted is important because it uncovers the specific subject-matter being laughed about. The results revealed a wide spectrum of subject-matter being laughed about, but most prominently it was people (i.e. 80.2%) and the speaker (i.e. 39.7%) being the subject-matter of laughter.

**5.7 Analyzing Appeal [Why?]**

Analyzing the variable of Target is directed by the inquiry: “Why did the rhetorical humor appeal? How so?”

Analyzing why humor as rhetoric is attractive in a persuasive manner to result in sustained moments of laughter is covert and mostly idiosyncratic (i.e. peculiar to an
individual). Why the individuals who laughed laugh from the semiotic stimulus in rhetoric is largely governed by idiosyncratic variance (such as personal knowledge and understanding, psychological state of mind, and dispositional beliefs). Explorative explanations to most plausibly explain the logical appeal, emotional appeal, and character appeal in laughter moments are provided in this section.

For every laughter moment, there are differing details for why each laughter moment resonates logically, emotionally, and characterologically. However, there are also recurring themes. Based on the patterns that surfaced in my data, I explain that humor is rhetorically appealing for the individuals who laughed when a shift in cognition brings affective pleasure to enlarge a laughers’s ego.

Why (and How) Did Humor-Rhetoric Appeal in One WCPS® Speech
To examine more in depth the appeal of rhetorical humor, I will use one WCPS® speech as an exemplar for explanation because the full, entire context of the rhetoric analyzed can be provided for in this way. This WCPS® speech is selected because it had the most number of humor-rhetoric moments in a speech, as reported in Table 5.6 of section 5.1. So, this speech has the widest range in which I can delineate the logos, pathos, ethos implicit in boisterously-sustained laughter (moments) within a singular block of 7 min 15 secs. This WCPS® speech also had the most number of laughter instances in a speech, above and beyond the other 56 WCPS® speeches which had a collective mean of 14.9 (and a median of 14) laughter instances per speech. Specifically, there were 37 laughter instances (12 laughter instances of less than 1000ms, 12 laughter instances between 1000ms and 1999ms, and 13 laughter moments of at least 2000ms) in this WCPS® speech (t = 7 min 15 secs). The whole
performance of this WCPS® speech is publicly available at
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TUk9bTnzQHg, which was uploaded by the
Toastmaster Club that the speaker represented with subtitles/closed captions (CCs)
being embedded. The unabridged transcript is also documented in Supplementary
Material 2.

“My Life as an Underground Commodities Dealer” is the title of this WCPS®
speech. “John Andrews”, who is the winning representative of District 60 of
Toastmasters International, is the speaker of this spotlighted WCPS® speech. District
60 of Toastmasters International is restricted to only Toastmasters-members in the
region of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Speaker “John Andrews” is the only
Toastmaster to have had represented District 60, among the 6 Finals of the WCPS®
analyzed, because the other 5 winners of District 60 in the preceding years (i.e. “Yan
Clumpus” in 2015, and “Ted Lyberogiannis” in 2016) competed but did not win at
the level of the Inter-District Semi-Finals.

Speaker “John Andrews” was speaking at the 2017 World Championship of Public
Speaking® (WCPS®), and he was Finalist #3 to appear on stage for the label of 17F3
henceforth. 17F3 was speaking in Vancouver, Canada, at the Vancouver Convention
Centre to a reported audience in-attendance of 2500+. In terms of the objective
physical appearance that 17F3 presented on stage, 17F3 was a bald-shaven man,
wearing spectacles, with black facial hair being prominent in the regions of his lips
and lower-chin. He wore a black blazer, over a black shirt and a black tie which had
streaks of purple, as well as black pants and black shoes. Subjectively, 17F3
appeared to be in his late 30s, if not early 40s. The stature of his body can be
described as a tall and strong built to be weighing about 90 kilograms. His ethnic
appearance can be interpreted as a heritage-mixed and a racial categorization of his
human skin color would be brown. Figure 5.5 below shows a picture of 17F3, at $t = 0$, right before he began his speech.

Figure 5.5: A Picture of 17F3, at $t = 0$, Right Before He Began His WCPS® Speech -
“My Life as an Underground Commodities Dealer”
17F3 started his speech, at $t = 0$, by posing tall and strong, with both hands placed firmly on his hips. 17F3 furrowed his eyebrows when he said the first words of his speech, “Unemployed and desperate. You ever been there? Because I have.” (see: https://youtu.be/Sm6mHKPmSpc?t=0). 17F3 continued to furrow his eyebrows as he spoke, “Right around the time I started hanging out with a bunch of people I would
regard as ... Purveyors of underground commodities and services.”. There was an audible laughter recorded of less than 1000ms at this point in time. Plausibly, this laughter instance was triggered by the semiotic use of the word “purveyors”. From a semiotic standpoint regarding the usage of English Language words, it is refreshing to associate the word of “purveyors” with “underground commodities and services”. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2018), the meaning of the word “purveyor” refers to (i) “a person who sells or deals in particular goods, such as luxury vehicles”, or (ii) “a person or group who spreads or promotes an idea, view, etc, such as traditional Christian values”. Perceiving this playful, atypical association of “purveyors” with “underground commodities and services” can trigger a passing laughter (of superiority/ fulfillment) when one has the linguistic capacity to notice-and-resolve the appropriate incongruity, arising from the semiotic of words used. This first laughter instance (i.e. 17F3.1) is however not a humor-rhetoric moment because it did not meet the criterion of ≥ 2000ms of audible laughter. 17F3 did not pause substantially from speaking after saying the punchline, “Purveyors of underground commodities and services”, and the semiotic play in 17F3.1 was not humorous enough for 2 seconds of audible laughter to manifest. Only semiotic play that manifested laughter of ≥ 2000ms was analyzed as a humor-rhetoric moment.

When using in-ear earpieces and the software Media Player Classic that displays how time progresses in terms of milliseconds (ms), 17F3.4 was the first moment in this speech that had ≥ 2000ms of audible laughter. Laughter during 17F3.4 (see: https://youtu.be/Sm6mHKPmSp?t=63) started at \( t = 1 \) min 9 secs and the speaker paused substantially from speaking for > 4000ms before resuming his speech again at \( t = 1 \) min 13 secs. This strategic pause from speaking for > 4000ms suggests that
the speaker had rhetorical intent for laughter to manifest, unlike laughter instance 17F3.1 when the pause from speaking was < 500ms. In total, there were 13 unique moments in this speech when laughter of ≥ 2 seconds was recorded. These 13 humor-rhetoric moments were rhetorically crafted by 17F3 with a substantial pause from speaking and by being substantially humorous in his rhetoric. I will now deconstruct the rhetorical appeal of these 13 laughter moments into its constituent elements of logos-pathos-ethos. Why did humor-rhetoric appeal in terms of humor-logos, humor-pathos, and humor-ethos? How is logical appeal, emotional appeal and character appeal connotated in laughter? Please note that the following report on the interpretations were cross-checked in discussion with two coders who were previously Toastmasters members, as explained in section 4.2. Deconstructing the big question of “Why do people laugh?” is never overt (i.e. directly observable) but deeply covert (i.e. cannot be directly observed) and therefore the details in arguments need to be elaborative.

1. Why Did Humor-Rhetoric 17F3.4 Appeal?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17F3.4</td>
<td>[My Life as an Underground Commodities Dealer. John Andrews. ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployed and desperate. You ever been there? Because I have.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Right around the time I started hanging out with a bunch of people I would regard as … Purveyors of underground commodities and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
services. \{Audience laughs for \(<1 \text{ sec}, \text{ under 17F3.1}\}\} But I was
desperate, and they were recruiting. \{Audience laughs for \(<1 \text{ sec,}
under 17F3.2\}\} It started simply. I would run some errands, drive some
people around, and soon I was thrust into a world full of pain,
suffering, and death. I told myself that we were meeting a need in the
community. But that was kind of the problem. Nobody wanted us.
They needed us. We made their problems go away, when all their other
options failed them. And after doing this for a little while, I realized I
didn't want to be a bit player in this show anymore. I wanted to run it
myself. So, I went back to college wrote my board exams. And for the
last 11 years, I have been a licensed funeral director. \{Audience laughs
for \(\geq 1 \text{ sec and } < 2 \text{ secs, under 17F3.3}\}\}

What did you think I meant when I said I was an underground
commodities dealer? [Speaker emphasized the word 'underground']
(Speaker rotated his wrist under and downwards while saying the word
‘underground’. Speaker was frowning in his eyebrows while keeping a
straight face) \{Audience laughs for \(> 4000\text{ms, under the moment
17F3.4}\}\}

(A clip that resulted in the moment of 17F3.4 is available at: https://youtu.be/Sm6mHKPmSpc?t=63)

Why is humor-rhetoric appealing in terms of logic? I argue that individuals who
laughed (i.e. laughers) laugh because they experienced a shift in cognition. This shift
in cognition resides in a sudden change of conscious perceptions, or thoughts, such
as unconsciously shifting from a serious state of mind to a playful mental state for laughter. Humor-rhetoric 17F3.4 was crafted in a way that allowed individuals, among the audience, to have a sudden change in perspective of what the word ‘underground’ meant. 17F3 communicated that he was working as an underground commodities dealer. 17F3 stated details such as him “hanging out with a bunch of people” who brought “pain, suffering, and death” and that “nobody wanted” him and them in the community. When 17F3 revealed that he is working as a “licensed funeral director” “for the past 11 years”, the audience realized that their previous thought that ‘underground’ likely meant ‘what is hidden, or secret, or illegal’ no longer applies. The thinking that ‘underground’ means ‘what is under the ground’ is now more likely, especially because the speaker visually expressed so, in the rotation of his wrist under and downwards when emphasizing the word ‘underground’. There is a sudden realization that their previous thought needs to change in order for logic to hold. Experiencing this split-second change in thinking has the potential to shift an individual from a serious state of mind to a playful mental state for laughter.

Why is humor-rhetoric appealing in terms of emotion? I argue that laughers laughed because of the affective pleasure that they could feel. There are many emotional routes to feel pleasure; a rhetoric that is humorous to result in laughter gives individuals at least one affect to feel pleasure from. In 17F3.4, the emotion of relief is one affect to feel pleasure from when the feeling of relief is released in laughter. To elaborate, individuals in the audience who are naturally empathetic may conceivably feel concern for the speaker. 17F3 was “unemployed and desperate” and “if you have ever been there” or allow yourself to imagine personally being in a situation of desperation, one may feel soft-hearted to his predicament.
Consequently, 17F3 “was thrusted into a world full of pain, suffering, and death” when he began his “life as an underground commodities dealer”. Following the narrative that 17F3 presented closely with emotions, an empathizing individual would naturally feel worried for 17F3 and his life. Doing underground work, in terms of illegal, secret, hidden activities, is dangerous. When 17F3 revealed that underground only meant directing funeral activities, antecedent fears were alleviated. Preceding discomfort for/of 17F3 turned out to be unwarranted. Authentically experiencing the emotion of relief can manifest in laughter when an outburst of tension release is afforded. The reaction of laughing is affectively pleasurable when prior feelings of discomfort are dissipated.

Why is humor-rhetoric appealing in terms of character? I argue that individuals who laughed laugh because their idiosyncratic ego is enlarged. An idiosyncratic ego can be enlarged via (i) psychodynamically appealing to the id and not offending the superego, (ii) realistically appealing to self-interest, and/or (iii) directly enabling laughers to feel superior. Laughter, arising from a Psychodynamic egoistic increase, reveals impulsive instincts that are not inhibited by one’s moralistic ideals. (Please refer to the details in the iceberg diagrams of Figures 3.3 and 3.4 in Chapter 3 for the analytical framework of Psychodynamics that this argument is based on). In 17F3.4, 17F3 was transgressive of conversational rules. He violated Grice’s Maxim of Manner (see Leech, 2014) that a speaker should be clear and unambiguous in communication. He knew that his speech was about “My Life as a Licensed Funeral Director” but he deliberately misled the audience right from the beginning with the title, “My Life as an Underground Commodities Dealer”. 17F3 was not obeying the collective superego of ideals in the societal and linguistic realm. The pleasure-
seeking id is instinctively attracted to the transgression of social rules for immediate gratification. As long as one is not inhibited by a moralistic ideal (such as ‘17F3 should not mislead the audience’ or ‘A speaker should be clear and unambiguous in communication’), the fulfillment of our impulses drives laughter.

2. Why Did Humor-Rhetoric 17F3.5 Appeal?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17F3.5</td>
<td>When my mom found out I wanted to do this, she was pun intended mortified! [Speaker raised the tone of his voice] (Speaker's right index finger was raised up before pointing at the audience) {Audience laughs for &gt; 2500ms}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(A clip of 17F3.5 is available at: https://youtu.be/Sm6mHKPmSpc?t=73)

17F3.5 appealed logically because of a shift in cognition it could give. A shift in cognition refers to at least one shift in thinking. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2018), the word ‘mortified’ has three meanings: (i) to feel very embarrassed or ashamed, (ii) to subdue the body of its needs and desires by self-denial or discipline, or (iii) to be affected by gangrene or necrosis to one’s flesh. Because the speaker had stated definitively that he had intended for the word ‘mortified’ to be meant as a “pun”, an engaged listener would have to cognitively shift among all three possible meanings to understand the logic of what the speaker
was trying to communicate. Not everyone in the audience of 2500+ may have the vocabulary knowledge to be aware that there are three meanings to the word ‘mortified’, but some do. The humor is logically appealing when a listener realizes that it is possible for the speaker’s mother to be mortified in all three ways. The speaker’s mother: (i) can be feeling ashamed at her son’s decision to be a funeral director, (ii) can be in self-denial at her son’s choice of career to be subjugating her body, and (iii) can already be factually dead such that there is already necrosis to her flesh. There are three different thoughts to rationally consider and shift among. The cognition that the speaker’s mother can be mortified in three different logical ways is appealing to be embodied as laughter.

17F3.5 appealed emotionally because of the affective pleasure it could give. Rhetoric that is humorous to result in laughter gives individuals at least one affect to feel pleasure from. One emotional route to feel pleasure is through the feeling of superiority. Individuals in the audience, who have the linguistic competence to be aware of the triple-meaning or double-meaning in the word ‘mortified’ can enjoy a fleeting moment of superiority. The power of knowledge provides an affordance to feel superior, especially when one knows of his or her relative intelligence. The word ‘mortified’ is not a commonly known vocabulary. Hence, it is possible to feel that that one is smarter than others if one is competent to perceive-and-resolve the challenge of the linguistic pun (quickly). Feeling superior from one’s ability to understand the pun of ‘mortified’ offers a pathway for pleasure which can manifest in laughter.

17F3.5 appealed characterologically because it could enlarge a laugher’s ego.
Enabling individuals to feel superior in laughter can directly enlarge an idiosyncratic ego. It instinctively feels good for the ego when one feels pleasure (e.g. from the affect of superiority). Additionally, it immediately feels good for the psychodynamic id when one feels pleasure from the fulfillment of impulses (e.g. to disobey authority figures). Due to the existential debt we owe to our mothers, a mother holds moral influence and authority over her child. As evident in his tone and visuals, 17F3 proudly and loudly mocked his mother’s reaction to his vocational choice. 17F3 was unabashed that his mother, one of his moral authority, is embarrassed, ashamed, or mortified. As long as a laugh is not inhibited by a moralistic ‘should’ (such as ‘17F3 should respect his mother’ or ‘17F3 should not be rude to his mother’s views’), fulfilling the impulses of our self-centered id drives the enlarging of our idiosyncratic ego to feel superior.

3. Why Did Humor-Rhetoric 17F3.11 Appeal?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17F3.11</td>
<td>Be honest. If you had a choice between your son joining the mob or funeral servicemen? Merrrrrr... {Audience laughs for ≥ 1 sec and &lt; 2 secs, under 17F3.6} It would be a tough call. Let me tell you some of the advantages of being my kind of underground commodities dealer. Particularly if you're ethically flexible. {Audience laughs for ≥ 1 sec and &lt; 2 secs, under 17F3.7} Single people this is a great way to get dates. {Audience groans and laughs for &lt; 1 sec, under 17F3.8} Easy...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They come to you. They need a shoulder to cry on... {Audience laughs for $&lt; 1$ sec, under 17F3.9} And just in case you got your eye on the one who's umm... How can I put this? Newly single again. {Audience laughs for $\geq 1$ sec and $&lt; 2$ secs, under 17F3.10. Some groans were heard.}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hey, when they are ready to love again, you have earned a place in their heart. [Speaker spoke with righteousness in tone] (Speaker pointed at his heart and bounced causally for a split-instance) {Audience laughs for $&gt; 2000$ ms, under 17F3.11; no groans at all}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(A clip of 17F3.11, starting from 17F3.6, is available at: [https://youtu.be/Sm6mHKPmSp?t=79](https://youtu.be/Sm6mHKPmSp?t=79))

**17F3.11** appealed logically because of a shift in cognition it could give.

Experiencing a mental shift in perspective, or thoughts, can cognitively stimulate laughter. From $t = 1$ min 39 secs to 1 min 42 secs (see: [https://youtu.be/Sm6mHKPmSp?t=99](https://youtu.be/Sm6mHKPmSp?t=99)), the speaker presented a (puzzling) thought that being a funeral director “is a great way to get dates”. Groans were heard because some people did not necessarily agree (morally) with the thought. Equally audible though, which is verifiable with in-ear earpieces, was laughter. Some people, on the other hand, reacted with amusement at the same thought stimulus. Majority of the audience may, however, just hold their judgement first at the point of $t = 1$ min 42 secs, and just be quietly puzzled by the reasoning of this (atypical) thought. After the speaker had adequately presented the logic that the funeral director gets dates because “you have earned a place in their heart” when you were there in their
moments of vulnerability, the audience had sufficient understanding of the speaker’s perspective to evidently laugh out at $t = 2 \text{ min } 00 \text{ secs}$ for $> 2000\text{ms}$. A sufficient number of people had an embodied experience of a perspective shift from puzzlement to understanding. They now understand the speaker’s logic. For laughter to be triggered because of one’s thoughts, it did not matter if 17F3’s logic is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, a fallacy-of-thought or logically robust. The logical appeal of humor-rhetoric 17F3.11 resides in the thinking-shift that is personally experienced. For people within the audience who do not personally experience a shift in thinking, they may not personally experience the humor-logos in humor-rhetoric 17F3.11 to involuntarily laugh out during $t = 2 \text{ min } 00 \text{ secs}$ to $t = 2 \text{ min } 02 \text{ secs}$.

17F3.11 appealed emotionally because of the affective pleasure it could give. Experiencing pleasure from emotions can affectively stimulate laughter. One affective route to feel pleasure from is through the feeling of surprise. Surprise was the affect that was interpreted to be most strongly implicit in 17F3.11. Most people in the 2500+ audience would likely not have expected 17F3 to say with righteousness in his tonality “you have earned a placed in their heart” to justify the opportunism in dating somebody who is “newly single again” because their significant other had presumably just died. To feel surprise is affectively pleasurable when it gives excitement. The individuals who laughed (i.e. laughers) were entertained by the unforeseen surprise that 17F3 stimulated them to feel.

17F3.11 appealed characterologically because it could enlarge a laughers ego. Appealing to the pleasure-seeking id while not offending the moralistic superego can psychodynamically enlarge a laughers ego. The buildup to laughter moment
17F3.11 included the audience groaning twice in laughter ID# 17F3.8 and 17F3.10. To groan and laugh at the same time is not possible. For the individuals who reacted by groaning, rather than laughing, the humor in rhetoric being in conflict with their moralistic ideals was connotated. The audible sounds of groaning implied that some individuals were offended, rather than humored, by his rhetoric. The job of a funeral director should not be “a great way to get dates” and a funeral director should not “eye on” his “newly single” lady clients. In 17F3.11, there were no audible groans at all that co-occurred with the laughter sounds. 17F3 elaborating that the proposition of dates with “newly single” lady clients would only work “when they are ready to love again” and “you have earned a place in their heart”, as a justification, is presumably more acceptable moralistically. As long as moralistic virtues do not inhibit us, impulsive vice impels us to laugh. 17F3 was impulsive and transgressive (i.e. going beyond the limit of what is morally, socially, or legally acceptable) in his social pursuit for dates. If our ideals and morals can be momentarily forsaken, the humor in 17F3.11 is instinctively attractive because social inhibitions are disregarded in the pursuit of pleasure.

4. Why Did Humor-Rhetoric 17F3.12 Appeal?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 17F3.12       | Now, let's say I meet an attractive young widow and I want to take her out on a date. A gentleman brings flowers, doesn't he? Bang!
                | Undertakers get free flowers. [Speaker raised his voice and was serious |
17F3.12 appealed logically because of a shift in cognition it could give. A shift in cognition refers to at least one shift in thinking. 17F3 created a shift in the expectations of a “gentleman”. A gentleman is defined as “a chivalrous, courteous, or honorable man” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018). It is not expected that when a gentleman “brings flowers” “on a date”, the flowers were not freshly bought, least of all taken from a funeral. The irony that the speaker was loudly doing the opposite of chivalry, courtesy, and honorability is amusing. The dictionary definition and semiotic of chivalry, politeness, honor no longer apply. The speaker created a perspective change in the thought of what a “gentleman” would do. In addition, individuals who laughed might also have experienced a shift in cognition which arose from not thinking that ‘undertakers can get free flowers’ to now thinking that they can. This new thought is rationally valid because, after a funeral wake, there are often flowers left behind and the funeral director gets the “free flowers”. When an individual experienced a split-second cognitive shift, laughter can be triggered from the logic of thoughts.

17F3.12 appealed emotionally because of the affective pleasure it could give. Rhetoric that is humorous to result in laughter gives individuals at least one affect to feel pleasure from. One emotional route to feel pleasure is through the feeling of amusement. Amusement was the emotion that was interpreted to be most strongly
implicit in this laughter moment. 17F3 spoke with an intensity of energy when he raised his voice and shouted, “Bang! Undertakers get free flowers”. 17F3 declaring with visual confidence and tonal authority about the free flowers that a gentleman brings for a date in a loud and ungentlemanly manner is amusing. The pleasant entertainment that one reactionarily feels can be the affective source of pleasure residing in 17F3.12. When enough individuals laugh out of amusement (or from any other affect), group laughter is audible. In fact, this group laughter moment was recorded to last for >6000ms.

17F3.12 appealed characterologically because it could enlarge a laughser’s ego. Appealing to self-interest can realistically enlarge a laughser’s ego. Apart from being impacted by the intra-forces of the superego and id, the psychodynamics of an individual’s ego is in itself regulated by self-interest and the reality principle (i.e. the ability of the mind to assess the reality of the external world, and to act upon it accordingly). The content in humor-rhetoric 17F3.12 appeals to and resonates with self-interest. Getting away with taking free stuff and opportunistically using them in a gainful manner is to our personal advantage. The reality that there are many flowers for an undertaker to take home after a funeral holds true too. As long as the morality principle governing the superego does not consciously and unconsciously inhibit with a moralistic ideal (such as ‘A funeral director should not re-use the flowers after a funeral’ or ‘Nobody should bring flowers that are free or stealthily obtained for a date’), self-orientated drives for pleasure impels laughser that is rooted in an egoistic increase. Egoistic laughter is self-orientated which means that the action/reaction of laughter is based on the laughser’s interests rather than the interests of others. Non-egoistic laughter, on the contrary, is others-oriented which means that
the act of laughing is for the interests of others. Non-egoistic laughter was not observed in all 262 moments of laughter of this study, but how it manifests in other social context is discussed in section 6.7.

5. Why Did Humor-Rhetoric 17F3.15 Appeal?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17F3.15</td>
<td>Honey, technically they're used but it still smells nice. {Audience laughs for $\geq 1$ sec and $&lt; 2$ sec, under 17F3.13} And I was thinking of you when I stole them off … umm... That card’s not for you, hold on. {Audience laughs for $\geq 1$ sec and $&lt; 2$ sec, under 17F3.14} Say I've had a few dates and it's time to take this relationship to the next level (Speaker kneeled on one knee). Want to look in her big pretty eyes and ask her to be mine forever. (Speaker was still kneeling on one knee, and he clasped his hands together to communicate the visual image of a marriage proposal). Gonna need a ring for that, aren't I? Bang! Undertakers get free jewelry! [Speaker raised his voice and spoke with full conviction.] (Speaker repeated the same play of gestures as 17F3.12, shooting his fingers diagonally up and then diagonally down in rhythm with his words) {Audience laughs for $&gt; 2500$ms + groans heard}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
17F3.15 appealed logically because of a shift in cognition it could give. A shift in cognition refers to at least one shift in thinking. 17F3 produced a shift in the expectations and thoughts of (the romance in) a marriage proposal. It is not expected that in (the romance of) a marriage proposal, the would-be groom would be proposing with “free jewelry” that he inferably “stole”. There can also be a shift in one’s assumed thought that an undertaker, whom you entrusted the funeral of your loved one with, would not take away any accompanying jewelry. Cognitively, some people may be aware that all that was said by 17F3 is not meant to be taken seriously, because 17F3 did not and will not actually steal jewelry in real life. If he did this unlawful act, he would not be announcing it publicly to be immediately incriminated after the WCPS®. There are also real-world ramifications that the deed of stealing jewelry will have on his career and professional reputation. However, to analyze the shift in thoughts that was implicit to trigger the > 2500ms of laughter, it did not matter if 17F3 really did the deed or hypothetically did so. What matters is if there was a shift in perspective within one’s own mental thoughts. Up to the point in time when 17F3 said “Gonna need a ring for that, aren’t I”, there is no sufficient reason to think that this is going to be (i) an atypical marriage proposal, (ii) an atypical jewelry ring, or (iii) an atypical undertaker again. Only at the point in time after 17F3 said, “Bang! Undertakers get free jewelry” was there sufficient reason to think that this is (i) an atypical marriage proposal, (ii) an atypical jewelry ring, and/or (iii) an atypical undertaker again. When one experiences a sudden perspective-shift that this is (i) an atypical marriage proposal, (ii) an atypical jewelry ring, or (iii) an atypical undertaker again, can there be a logical appeal for laughter
to arise within an individual. The unexpected behavior and words of the speaker triggered at least one thought-shift in the minds of the audience. Importantly, a cognitive shift can also manifest in terms of a serious state of mind shifting to a playful mental state for laughter. To shift to a play frame means that serious, intellectual mental activity is disengaged to have the awareness that what is communicated is not serious. Fundamentally, there is a shift from thinking seriously to not thinking seriously. Individuals who laughed regarded 17F3.15 as play. They recognize that “get free jewelry!” is only a joke that is not meant to be taken seriously.

17F3.15 appealed emotionally because of the affective pleasure it could give. One affective route to feel pleasure from is through the feeling of nonseriousness\(^1\). 17F3 was performing a nonserious joke. In this joke, 17F3 was kneeling on one knee before he suddenly gets a “free jewelry”. 17F3 was explicit in repeating the same play in gestures that he did for 17F3.12 (i.e. shooting his fingers diagonally up and then diagonally down), as well as cueing with the same joke line of ‘Bang! Undertakers get something for free’. Feeling that 17F3 playing a fool is critical to disengage from the default state of seriousness. Momentarily disengaging from serious, mental thinking is pleasurable when the cognitive demands on the prefrontal cortex are temporarily reduced.

17F3.15 appealed characterologically because it could enlarge a laugher’s ego.

Appealing to self-interest can realistically enlarge a laugher’s ego. Individuals who

\(^1\) Note that the concept of nonseriousness as a feeling state is explained in detail in Chafe (2007). Norrick (2009) agrees with Chafe’s conception of nonseriousness as a feeling state.
laughed are interpreted as self-orientated in their behavioral reaction; the interest of
the deceased is disregarded for personal joy and laughter. Whereas, people who
groaned displayed non-egoism and are interpreted as others-orientated in thought
and behavior; they cared for the interests of the deceased (whose “ring” and
“jewelry” 17F3 presumably “stole”) to instinctively feel repulsed and groaned. To
react by concurrently groaning and laughing is not possible. Therefore, I interpret
that the audience can only react to this humor-rhetoric in one of three main ways: (i)
laugh egoistically, (ii) groan audibly, or (iii) produce no audible sound within the
short time window afforded in 17F3.15. Remarkably, out of all the 262 laughter
moments in the 57 WCPS® speeches, 17F3.15 is the only laughter moment to have
had both laughter and groans. Audibly-speaking, the response of laughter was more
substantial than the response of groans, though it cannot be verifiably stated that the
combined sound of laughter was much louder and longer than the combined sound
of groans that was heard. For the individuals who groaned, it is implicit that they
were not in a play frame. They believed the words of 17F3 and were perceptibly
offended. For the individuals who laughed, it is implicit that they were in a
nonserious frame. They did not take the words of 17F3 seriously and were more
interested in the immediate cognitive and emotional pleasures that can be derived
from his rhetoric. In that fleeting moment of laughter, ethical ideals (such as
considering the morality of his behavior to the deceased or having an ethical regard
that ‘He should not take free jewelr
y from dead people’) do not matter as an interest
of concern to a momentarily self-centered laugh. Self-interested wants and needs
are more important for an egoistic laugh.

6. Why Did Humor-Rhetoric 17F3.16 Appeal?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17F3.16</td>
<td>Hey, what I said was, I want you to have grandma's ring. <strong>I never said it was my grandma's ring.</strong> [Speaker emphasized the word ‘my’ and spoke with righteousness in his tonality. Volume of speech changed from soft to loud.] (Speaker removed the ring from his left ring finger, showed the ring to the audience, wore the ring again on his right index finger to seemingly wave ‘no, no, no’ three times to the audience, before pointing to himself five times with the ring hanging over his right index finger) {Audience laughs for &gt; 4500ms}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(A clip of 17F3.16 is available at: [https://youtu.be/Sm6mHKPmSpG?t=164](https://youtu.be/Sm6mHKPmSpG?t=164))

17F3.16 appealed logically because of the shift in cognition it could give. When 17F3 said “I want you to have grandma’s ring”, the bride-to-be (and the audience) would presume that the ring belonged to 17F3’s grandma. After 17F3 said the punchline, “I never said it was my grandma’s ring”, the bride-to-be (and the audience) would now think that the ring can belong to any grandma. This shift in thinking is dormant to be perceived and can shift an individual from seriousness to a playful mental state for laughter. In this play frame of mind, a laugher is cognitively disengaged from serious thinking to know that what 17F3 is communicating is all but a joke. Words are not meant to be taken seriously. The point of a joke rhetoric is
to laugh and to not think seriously. Idiosyncratically shifting into a mental state of not thinking seriously is pivotal for idiosyncratic laughter to emanate.

17F3.16 appealed emotionally because of the affective pleasure it could give. One affective pathway to feel pleasure from is through the feeling of not feeling. Emotional disengagement from empathizing with others merging with cognitive disengagement from thinking seriously is synergistically pleasurable when it is a momentary escape from the incessant thinking and feeling that we engage in.

17F3.16 occurred at a time in which he had made the audience laughed 14 times within a burst of two minutes (i.e. t = 50 secs to t = 2 min 50 secs). During 17F3.16 at t = 2 min 50 secs, it is possible for an individual to be empathetically numbed to not feel anymore (e.g. ‘I do not feel for the bride-to-be who received a random ring’). Almost every sentence that 17F3 had said prior resulted in laughter and laughter was intensely surfacing at a rate of once every 8.6 seconds for a full two minutes. If a laugher embodied every laughter instance involuntarily, the bodily experience would be highly immersive such that it would not be unreasonable to infer a transcendent laughing state of not thinking and not feeling, but just laughing. (This is akin to the transcendent meditative state1 of not thinking and not feeling, but yet completely aware). The feeling of not feeling to enjoy pleasure is emotionally compelling.

17F3.16 appealed characterologically because it could enlarge a laugher’s ego. Appealing to the id while not offending the superego can psychodynamically enlarge a laugher’s ego. Under a Psychodynamics analytical framework (please see the

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1 A transcendent meditative state is often associated to Transcendental Meditation, which refers to a silent mantra meditation approach to detach oneself while still being aware of the surroundings.
ocean iceberg in Figure 3.4), an idiosyncratic ego dynamically shrinks or enlarges depending on the external and interior forces on the conscious and the unconscious. The *superego* is an interior barrier blocking the *id* from influencing the conscious mind. The *id* (which is deeply rooted in the unconscious) can only influence the conscious mind and the *ego* when the *superego* does not oppose. In 17F3.16, 17F3 playacted a conversation that he had with the proposed bride-to-be (whom he may already have married to have this conversation) and spoke with full authority and conviction. 17F3 justified that technically there is no deceit because he did not “ask her to be mine forever” by saying “I want you to have *my* grandma’s ring”. 17F3 strongly insisting and maintaining strongly there is no wrongdoing enthralled the audience. Laughter was rapturous for a sustained duration of > 4500ms. Apart from the logical and emotional appeal of being cognitively and emotionally disengaged to feel momentary joy, 17F3.16 characterologically appealed to a laugher’s *id*. An individual’s *id* is driven by irrational wants (such as ‘I want to be right’) for immediate gratification. 17F3 relying on brute aggression and misrepresentation to egoistically win an argument is instinctively appealing for the self-centered and pleasure-seeking *id*. However, the *superego* serves as a conscience barrier to block impulsive wants. It is critical that the humor-rhetoric does not offend the *superego*. Unlike the irrational *id*, the *superego* is rational and holds strong, unwavering convictions. As long as the humor-rhetoric does not offend a serious conviction (such as, ‘A man should not shout at his bride-to-be in all circumstances’, or ‘A wedding ring should seriously symbolize love, not jokes, theft or laughter’), the psychodynamic *ego* is boosted to laugh from the impulses of the *id* when an idiosyncratic *superego* does not oppose.
### 7. Why Did Humor-Rhetoric 17F3.20 Appeal?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17F3.20</td>
<td>If you get the option to marry an undertaker, say I do. {Audience laughs for &lt; 1 sec, under 17F3.17} Because when you asked us, how was your day? The answer will never be mehh nothing special. {Audience laughs for &lt; 1 sec, under 17F3.18} We see it all and I'm not just talking about the gory stuff either. The things you life people have asked me to do in my career have been downright mind-boggling. {Audience laughs for ≥ 1 sec and &lt; 2 sec, under 17F3.19} Like do I need to bring in pants for my dad's viewing if the lower half of the casket is going to be closed anyways? [Vocal tonality varied from matter-of-factly to increasingly surprise] (Speaker extended his arms out and looked visibly shocked. His jaw dropped while his eyebrows frowned) {Audience laughs for &gt; 3000ms, under 17F3.20}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(A clip of 17F3.20, starting from 17F3.17, is available at: [https://youtu.be/Sm6mHKPmSpc?t=175](https://youtu.be/Sm6mHKPmSpc?t=175))

17F3.20 appealed logically because of a shift in cognition it could give. In the rhetoric presented, 17F3 switched between the thoughts of his client and the thoughts of himself. Individuals who laughed might have experienced a change in perspective from the thought that 'it may be alright for a dead person to not wear...
pants’ to the thought that ‘it is not alright for a dead person to not wear pants’.

Experiencing a spilt-second shift in thinking can cognitively stimulate laughter.

17F3.20 appealed emotionally because of the affective pleasure it could give. One affective pathway to feel pleasure is through the feeling of schadenfreude joy. Schadenfreude joy refers to the pleasure or satisfaction received because of another person’s misfortune. In 17F3.20, the male deceased is misfortunate to have a son or a daughter who considered placing him in his casket without his pants since “the lower half of his casket is going to be closed anyways”. The reactionary laughter for > 2500ms in 17F3.20 suggests that the impulsive, uninhibited part of our psyche (i.e. the id) received spontaneous joy from the misfortune of the deceased. For some, learning of another’s person misfortune is a pathway to feel impulsive pleasure.

17F3.20 appealed characterologically because it could enlarge a laughers’ ego. An individual’s ego can be directly enlarged by enabling an individual to feel superior in laughter. It is impulsive but natural for the primitive id to unconsciously label people who asked idiotic questions, such as ‘Can I not give my father pants to wear since the lower half of his casket is going to be closed anyways?’, as immature or stupid. There is an ego boost to be experienced in laughing down on the immaturity or stupidity of others. Perceiving an eminency in oneself, relative to the foolishness of others, enlarges one’s ego. Given that there was > 2500ms of loud, reactionary laughter in 17F3.20, I assert that some laughers involuntarily felt superior to that ludicrous son or daughter who asked that “mind-boggling” question. As long as a laughers is not momentarily inhibited by the psychodynamics of a super-egoistic ‘should’ (such as ‘People should not be made fun of’ or ‘Silly questions should
seriously still be respected’), impulsive wants to feel superior for egoistic drives impel laughter.

8. Why Did Humor-Rhetoric 17F3.23 Appeal?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17F3.23</td>
<td>We consider that dignified, yeah bring in his pants. {Audience laughs for $\geq 1$ sec and $&lt; 2$ sec, under 17F3.21} Excuse me sirrr ... but do you give seniors discount sirrr ...? {Audience laughs for $&lt; 1$ sec, under 17F3.22} Well who do you think does all the dying?! [Speaker spoke with irritation in his voice] (Speaker frowned his eyebrows, blinked his eyes slowly, looking visibly annoyed) {Audience laughs for $&gt; 4000$ms, under 17F3.23}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(See: https://youtu.be/TUk9bTnzQHg?t=227 for the broader context of 17F3.23)

17F3.23 appealed logically because of a shift in cognition it could give. 17F3 presented a thought that possibly seniors are entitled to a funeral discount before firmly declining it with a rhetorical question. Implicitly, individuals who laughed might have experienced a thinking-shift in the thought that ‘Seniors could have a discount’ to the thought that ‘Seniors do not have a discount’. Experiencing a split-
second change in thinking can stimulate an individual to shift from a serious state of mind to a playful mental state for laughter.

17F3.23 appealed emotionally because of the affective pleasure it could give. One affective pathway to stimulate laughter is through fear. Overall speaking, 17F3 transmitted fear. Leading up to this laughter moment, 17F3 had shouted at many instances during his rhetoric and was largely angry and intimidating as an undertaker. In 17F3.23, an elder person asked if there is a senior’s discount when he or she dies, but the request was sternly shot down with the punchline, “Who do you think does all the dying?!”. To be afraid of dying is common and the thought of death is fearful. 17F3.23’s punchline can trigger emotional schemas related to “dying” such that, for some, the immediate response is to reactionarily laugh out of fear. They do so because fear is an aversive emotion and to react by laughing is comforting for the affective pleasure it gives to briefly reduce the fear and pull an individual back to a baseline state of being.

17F3.23 appealed characterologically because it could enlarge a laughers’s ego. Appealing to self-interest can realistically enlarge a laughers’s ego. Apart from meditating between the intra-forces of the superego and id, an individual’s ego is in itself regulated by self-interest and the reality principle. 17F3.23 appealed to self-interest and to reality. Prioritizing capitalistic profits over socialistic concessions for business practicality is in favor of self-interest. Seniors being of a demographic group that does more of the dying is of a reality too. Speaking the truth and communicating self-centric ideas are intrinsically charming because it instinctively resonates with the reality of self-interest, as well as deep, unconscious, impulsive
desires of the *id* to persuade action/reaction. Self-interest, which prioritizes personal needs and wants first, is real and in itself not morally wrong. Involuntarily caring for the interest and concerns of the senior who was openly mocked as an immediate reaction is in contrast morally applaudable. As long as a laugher is not consciously and unconsciously held back *seriously* by an ethical ideal (such as ‘He should seriously be courteous to the requests of seniors’ or ‘It is morally wrong to mock seniors, be it as a joke or not’), succumbing to the immediate interests of the self for egoistic pleasure motivates laughter.

9. Why Did Humor-Rhetoric 17F3.24 Appeal?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17F3.24</td>
<td>I once buried this little Italian lady, and her family said every time they saw her, she was eating a piece of bread. She loved it. Could we put a piece of bread in her hands in the casket? I said no problem, except they forgot to bring in bread. Being quick-thinking, I said it's Christmas time, our receptionist baked some sugar cookies. I could put one of those in her hands. It would look about the same. <strong>No no she can't have that! She's a diabetic</strong> [Speaker shouted and started to speak with an Italian accent] (Speaker raised both hands animatedly, before placing all of his right fingers on his head while collecting all of his left fingers to touch his left thumb to show an iconic Italian gesture – the ‘Ma Che Vuoi?’) {Audience laughs for &gt; 8000ms}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
17F3.24 appealed logically because of a shift in cognition it could give. 17F3 presented a problem that a female deceased enjoyed eating bread, and her family members wanted to “put a piece of bread in her hands in the casket” “except that they forgot to bring in bread” for the funeral. 17F3 offered a solution of a sugar cookie, but the family members of the deceased declined the idea of a sugar cookie as the substitute for the bread. The manner in which 17F3 playacted himself as a family member of the deceased to theatrically reject the proposed solution triggered loud, reactionary laughter in 17F3.24. A shift in cognition that is inherent to be perceived includes a perspective-change in the thought that ‘The cookie is appropriate as a bread substitute’ to the thought that ‘The cookie is no longer appropriate as a bread substitute’, as well as a shift from thinking seriously to not thinking seriously. Logically, individuals who laughed plausibly know that family of the deceased did not seriously react so theatrically in the manner that 17F3 presented. Allowing adults to momentarily disengaged from serious, intellectual thinking to be transiently nonserious so as to enjoy the nonserious theatrics is cognitively appealing to motivate audience laughter.

17F3.24 appealed emotionally because of the affective pleasure it could give. One affective route to feel pleasure (from) is through the feeling of play. 17F3 was playful in abruptly changing his tone of voice to parody an Italian speaking, as well as notably gesticulating with the iconic Italian hand gesture of ‘Ma Che Vuoi?’ with his left hand. The iconic gesture of ‘Ma Che Vuoi?’, which is well-documented in
movies and pop culture, is typified by gathering all the fingertips on one hand and shaking the hand up and down to express ‘What (the heck) do you want?’.

17F3.24 can transition adults into the affective state of play if they feel that he is merely playing a fool with theatrics to be comical. Internally feeling the feeling of play is pleasurable to emotionally provoke laughter.

17F3.24 appealed characterologically because it could enlarge a laughers’s ego. Enabling individuals to feel superior in laughter can directly boost a laughers’s ego. Inherent in 17F3.24 is the mockery of the “little Italian lady” who “can’t have” a sugar cookie even after she is dead because she is “diabetic”. Given that there was > 8000ms of authentic, embodied laughter in 17F3.24, it would not be implausible to infer that some laughers involuntarily felt some form of (unconscious) eminency over others when (i) Italians are mocked and (ii) being diabetic is ridiculed. To elaborate, an ethnocentric Singaporean may be enabled to feel momentarily superior to farcical Italians or a physically fit person may unconsciously feel superior to diabetic people in terms of health because being in a diabetic situation is seriously pitiful, rationally-speaking. An egoistic laugh can also be psychodynamically triggered via appealing to the id and not offending the superego. Socialized influences, such as cultural norms regarding civic virtues, educate people not to make fun of the peculiarities of other countries. In 17F3.24, 17F3 stereotyped Italians in their speech and gestures to comically poke fun at them. The pleasure-seeking id is impulsively entertained because the humor-rhetoric disregards societal norms and communicates improper behavior. The superego is however a regulator of proper behavior and serious convictions, serving as a conscience barrier to block impulsive wants from surfacing in conscious actions. As long as the humor-rhetoric
does not offend a serious conviction residing in an individual’s superego (such as, ‘Diabetic people should never be made fun of because I am diabetic’ or ‘I am a nationalistic Italian, and this is seriously not funny’), the idiosyncratic ego is boosted to laugh from the impulses of the id.

10. Why Did Humor-Rhetoric 17F3.29 Appeal?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 17F3.29       | One day, a lady actually asked me to tie off her husband before I buried him. When I say tie off her husband, I mean exactly what you're thinking right now.  
{Audience laughs for < 1 sec, under 17F3.25}  
Okay, she didn't want him down there getting frisky  
{Audience laughs for < 1 sec, under 17F3.26} with the ghoul next door.  
{Audience laughs for ≥ 1 sec and < 2 sec, under 17F3.27}  
So, she asked me to get a piece of cord and...  
{Audience laughs for < 1 sec, under 17F3.28}  
[Speaker spoke with astonishment] (Speaker demonstrated tying an imaginary cord over the central area of his body tightly)  
I'm trying to keep it family friendly here okay.  
{Audience laughs for > 2500ms, under 17F3.29} |

(See: https://youtu.be/TUk9bTnzQHg?t=273 for the broader context of 17F3.29)
17F3.29 appealed logically because of a shift in cognition it could give. 17F3 presented a situation that his lady client wanted to tie up her husband’s penis, so that her dead husband cannot have sexual intercourse with his underground neighbor. Until 17F3 decided to bring it up that his rhetoric is “family friendly”, the audience was not consciously thinking about his rhetoric being family friendly or not. One shift in thinking that can be experienced in 17F3.29 is a mental shift from the unconscious thought that ‘This is not family friendly’ to the conscious thought-evaluation that ‘This is still not family friendly’ (even though 17F3 claims it is). Experiencing a split-second shift in thinking can cognitively stimulate laughter. Talking about tying up a dead man’s penis with “a piece of cord” graphically and then claiming that the rhetoric is “family friendly” is logically amusing to facilitate laughter, instigated by thoughts.

17F3.29 appealed emotionally because of the affective pleasure it could give. One affective pathway to stimulate laughter is through the feeling of pain. Following the narrative that 17F3 presented closely with emotions, it is extremely painful to imagine your penis being tied up tightly. Particularly for a sensitive man in the audience, experiencing vicarious pain is presumable because each man only has one cherished penis to use. To reduce the feeling of pain, responding with laughter is emotionally appealing because it can give pleasure to mitigate affective pain.

17F3.29 appealed characterologically because it could enlarge a laughers’ ego. Appealing to the id while not offending the superego can psychodynamically enlarge a laughers’ ego. In 17F3.29, a lady intended to tie up her dead spouse’s penis to control the sexuality of her spouse even after his death. Collectively
speaking, it is in our self-interest if the sexuality of our spouse is controlled by us. It is not in our self-interest if the sexuality of your spouse is not controlled because infidelity can ensue. Therefore, the intentions of 17F3’s lady client although impulsive resonates with the reality of self-interest and appeals to our (collective) self-centered id. The moralistic superego is however a conscience barrier to block impulsive wants from surfacing in conscious actions. As long as the humor-rhetoric does not offend a serious conviction residing in an individual’s superego (such as ‘The topic of tying up a dead man’s penis is seriously distasteful and is always inappropriate to speak about’), the self-interested ego is boosted to laugh from the impulsive drives of the id.

11. Why Did Humor-Rhetoric 17F3.31 Appeal?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17F3.31</td>
<td>Lady here in Canada, our wedding vows are contingent on a five-word clause: Till Death Do Us Part. [Speaker shouted the five words with a high intensity of volume] It is selfish of you to think you're the only one who gets to date again {Audience laughs for ≥ 1 sec and &lt; 2 sec, under 17F3.30}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No. You are free. As is he. Leave the man be! [Speaker made a series of strong hand gestures, gesturing to the audience, gesturing downwards, and then gesturing broadly] [Speaker spoke loudly in
righteousness] {Audience laughs for > 4000ms, with cheers and a wolf whistle being audible}

(See: https://youtu.be/TUk9bTnzQHg?t=302 for the broader context of 17F3.31)

17F3.31 appealed logically because of a shift in cognition it could give. 17F3 responded to his lady client that she is “selfish” and shouted the five words “Till Death Do Us Part”. This meant that lovers can part at death. Together with his concluding sentence of “Leave the man be!”, there is now sufficient rational indication to deduce that 17F3 disregarded his lady client’s request and did not tie up the dead man’s penis. Experiencing a shift from a thought that ‘The dead man’s penis could be tied up’ to the sudden realization that ‘The dead man’s penis was not tied up’ can cognitively stimulate laughter. To experience new knowledge through a sudden shift in cognition is logically appealing.

17F3.31 appealed emotionally because of the affective pleasure it could give. One affective route to feel pleasure is through the feeling of mirth. Mirth is specified by Martin (2007) as an emotional mix of amusement, surprise, joy and is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary (2018) as amusement, joy, or gladness shown by or accompanied with laughter. Mirthful gladness and joy are likely inherent during the > 4000ms of laughter in 17F3.31. A laugher may feel glad that 17F3 repudiated his client’s request to react with joyful laughter. For some, how 17F3 righteously stood up for the brotherhood among men by berating his lady client angrily can provide the feeling of amusement too. Be it specifically the emotion of mirth,
amusement, surprise, superiority, or any other feeling, affective pleasure is implicit in the loud, boisterous laughter audible in 17F3.31.

17F3.31 appealed characterologically because it could enlarge a laugher’s ego. Enabling laughers to feel superior can directly enlarge a laugher’s ego. In 17F3.31, 17F3 advocated that “wedding vows” are no longer valid after death and his lady client should “Leave the man be!” Reactionary laughter, cheers, and a wolf whistle were heard. The wolf whistle was most likely contributed by a man rather than a lady. This is inferred based on 17F3.31 being about 17F3 standing up for a man against his wife in a (controlling) spousal relationship. If the ego of a man in the audience shrank (during his non-laughter periods starting from https://youtu.be/Sm6mHKPmSpc?t=248) when he started to perceive that his biological identity (i.e. one’s penis) is the rhetoric at issue being targeted for torture, 17F3.31 offers the best moment for an egoistic rebound. To react by laughing, cheering, or loudly wolf whistling is a pathway to boost one’s ego back to baseline, if it had previously shrunk. As for a woman in the audience, the humor-rhetoric appealing to her id while not offending her superego can boost her psychodynamic ego for laughter too. Simply knowing that 17F3 rejected the audacity of his client’s request can give mirthful gladness and joy to gratify her id that seeks pleasure. As long as the humor-rhetoric does not offend a serious conviction (such as ‘Marriage vows are valid eternally, even after death’ or ‘A husband should always be controlled by his wife, even after his death’) residing in an idiosyncratic superego, the psychodynamic ego is boosted to laugh from the impulsive, pleasure-seeking drives of the id.

12. Why Did Humor-Rhetoric 17F3.33 Appeal?
Laughter

Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.

17F3.33

See if I told you, you were getting a speech tonight about death from an undertaker, would you've wanted to hear it? Of course not, because death is the scariest topic you can bring up. But you don't look scared you look quite relaxed. You know why? You've been laughing. And let that be a lesson to you. The big takeaway from my speech: Laughter is the greatest weapon we have against fear. You can't be afraid of something while you're laughing at it. Okay, laughter is not always obvious. But found humor is a little like found money. It's extra sweet.

I bet you thought you couldn't joke about death without being morbid or gross. But you found: that's not true. I bet you thought an Undertaker could never make you laugh. But you found: that's not true. I bet you thought all Undertakers were big scary men in black who never smiled.

{Audience laughs for < 1 sec, under 17F3.32}  But… What?! [Speaker spoke with intimidation] (Speaker changed his focus of gaze to stare at the audience blankly, while keeping his left elbow in a 90° bent with left palm facing up) {Audience laughs for > 7000ms, under 17F3.33}

(A clip of 17F3.33 is available at: https://youtu.be/Sm6mHKPmSpc?t=301)

17F3.33 appealed logically because of a shift in cognition it could give. 17F3 presented three thoughts that an audience could have had before his speech: (i) “you
couldn’t joke about death without being morbid or gross”, (ii) “an Undertaker could never make you laugh”, and (iii) “all Undertakers were big scary men in black who never smiled”. 17F3 stated that the first two thoughts were no longer valid, but he deliberately stopped himself in the evaluation of the third thought. Unlike the first two thoughts, the third thought might still be valid because conspicuously, he was dressed in black and never once smiled in his speech. From the point of view of the audience who laughed, they were expecting a perspective-change to not have a perspective-change to result in a thinking-switch. Experiencing this split-second change in thinking can shift an individual from a serious state of mind to a playful mental state for laughter. 17F3 was intelligent in playfully not answering the last thought that he posed (i.e. “all Undertakers were big scary men in black who never smiled”) to facilitate the audience to have a shift in cognition.

17F3.33 appealed emotionally because of the affective pleasure it could give. One affective pathway to stimulate laughter is through the feeling of trust. Although 17F3 is an undertaker “in black who never smiled”, he had made the audience smile deeply to laugh for 33 times at this point in time (i.e. \( t = 5 \text{ min 50 secs} \)). An average of one unique laughter instance occurred at approximately every 10.6 seconds. To be laughing and hearing laughter arising from a unique joke rhetoric every 10 seconds within a substantial time-period of \( \approx 6 \) minutes, the audience was already in a general state of relaxed amusement from the environment of laughter. More importantly, the emotion of trust had steadily been built. At this point in time, 17F3 had already conveyed the intention of his speech, which is to let the audience experientially know that laughter is humanity’s “greatest weapon” when it relaxes people and is “extra sweet” to overcome “fear”. Most people would not feel that
17F3 did not mean well. There is sufficient trust in 17F3 at this moment in time to know that 17F3 do not have bad intentions. Besides, if it is true that a part of you opens up each time that you genuinely laugh, individuals had already opened up to 17F3 for 32 times prior. In 17F3.33, individuals trusted 17F3 enough to easily open up themselves again for laughter; 17F3 simply saying the word “what” was sufficient for rapturous laughter to erupt and persist for > 7000ms. The affective state of trust is clearly implicit and when people trust the rhetor, comfort and pleasure in laughter flows easier.

17F3.33 appealed characterologically because it could enlarge a laugher’s ego. Enabling laughers to feel superior can directly enlarge a laugher’s ego. The cognitive play in 17F3.33 is not overt and those who understood the joke can feel momentarily superior because there is a rationalizing challenge to overcome. 17F3 was also subtly mocking himself when he characterized himself as a big, scary man in black “who never smiled” to enable laughers to feel characterologically superior to him in the realm of heartily smiling and laughing. Additionally, a laugher’s ego can be psychodynamically enlarged by appealing to the id while not offending the superego. In 17F3.33, after 17F3 amused the audience with the word “what”, he stared at the audience in a blank, emotionless face and kept his left palm facing up. 17F3 was not moving and not speaking. The social tension encourages the impulsive id to laugh to break the social tension. However, 17F3 persisted by maintaining his motionless stance to increase the social tension that he produced, which in turn invites the impulsive id to laugh more. As long as the superego does not oppose to impose an inhibitory force on the impulsive id through a serious conviction (e.g. ‘I was raped by big scary men in black who never smiled when I was nineteen’ or ‘I
was strictly educated that a lady must never laugh loudly in public because doing so is uncouth to show improper upbringing’), impulsive wants to feel superior for egoistic drives impel laughter.

13. Why Did Humor-Rhetoric 17F3.35 Appeal?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which triggered audience laughter. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17F3.35</td>
<td>Fear has robbed humanity of more hopes and dreams than failure ever could. Because you can recover from failure and maybe come back even stronger, (while) fear takes you captive. But if you go through life armed with the most powerful weapon we have against fear, laughter, you will overcome more challenges in your life. And don't listen to these negative people who want to tell you laughter is a bad thing. Something negative. You know them, this is what they say. “He laughs at everything”, it's a coping mechanism to him. In my life as an underground commodities dealer, I've seen things you couldn't pay your therapist enough to help you un-see. {Audience laughs for $\geq 1$ sec and $&lt; 2$ sec, under 17F3.34}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And don't get me started on things I've smelt. [Speaker spoke sternly]

(Speaker raised his eyebrows and pointed with his left index finger)

{Audience laughs for $> 2500$ms, under 17F3.35}
Do you know why I'm not curled up in the fetal position every night? Because to steal a line from a great Canadian band - the Barenaked Ladies, {Audience laughs for < 1 sec, under 17F3.36} “I’m the kind of guy who laughs at a funeral. Can’t understand what I mean? You soon will.” {Audience laughs for ≥ 1 sec and < 2 sec, under 17F3.37} Laughter is not a coping mechanism Toastmaster. It is a survival skill. Because if learning to laugh is a coping mechanism, so is learning to swim. For he who laughs, last. Madam Chair.

(See: https://youtu.be/TUk9bTnzQHg?t=380 for the broader context of 17F3.35)

17F3.35 appealed logically because of a shift in cognition it could give. 17F3 created a salience that was previously unconscious in the minds of the audience. The audience was not thinking about 17F3 smelling the decomposed smell of dead people. After he said the punchline, the audience had to think about 17F3 smelling dead people throughout his career. A shift in cognition can be experienced when an unconscious thinking of ‘17F3 smelling the decomposed smell of dead people for 11 years’ surfaces into a conscious thinking of ‘17F3 smelling the decomposed smell of dead people (for 11 years) and he is still smelling them in his life as a funeral director’. Individuals who laughed experienced a thinking-shift from no thought that ‘17F3 smells dead people’ to a (new) thought that ‘17F3 has to smell dead people’. To uncover (new) knowledge through a shift in cognition is logically appealing.

17F3.35 appealed emotionally because of the affective pleasure it could give. For some people, the feeling of disgust can be immediately felt because of what 17F3
reminded them about in 17F3.35. The smell of dead corpses is presumably unpleasant and merely imagining smelling them can involuntarily result in the cringing of one’s nose as a reflex. The cringing of one’s nose signalizes the universal, facial expression of disgust. The feeling of disgust is not a pleasurable state to be in. There is a natural inclination to therefore seek responsive measures to return to a baseline state of affect. To respond by laughing is emotionally appealing because it provides affective pleasure to reduce the unpleasurable state of disgust.

17F3.35 appealed characterologically because it could enlarge a laugher’s ego. Enabling individuals to feel superior in laughter can directly enlarge a laugher’s ego. Upon learning of the unpleasant sights and smell that an undertaker has to engage in, people who laughed can briefly feel powerful, or eminency, that their occupation or vocational job is momentarily superior to 17F3’s job as an undertaker. Laughter in 17F3.35 has the characterological appeal to directly boost a laugher’s ego. Importantly, the feeling of superiority is primarily and fundamentally unconscious although a laugher could be psychologically aware that this laughter moment feels good for a boosted sense of importance upon self-reflection.

Summarizing the Appeal of Humor-Rhetoric

I deconstructed why do people laugh (or why did humor-rhetoric appeal in terms of logos, pathos, ethos) as largely due to a shift in cognition bringing affective pleasure to enlarge a laugher's ego. A shift in cognition refers to at least one shift in thinking (e.g. from thinking seriously to not thinking seriously). Affective pleasure can be felt via many emotional routes. How the feeling of (i) relief, (ii) superiority, (iii) surprise, (iv) amusement, (v) non-seriousness, (vi) not feeling, (vii) schadenfreude
joy, (viii) fear, (ix) play, (x) pain, (xi) mirth, (xii) trust, and (xiii) disgust can lead to
pleasure in laughter are pointed out. The affective routes to feel pleasure are
extensive and not limited to the 13 emotional routes that I drew attention to through
the speech of 17F3. A laugher's ego can be enlarged via three main pathways of (i)
psychodynamically appealing to the id and not offending the superego, (ii)
realistically appealing to self-interest, and/or (iii) directly enabling an idiosyncratic
'me' to feel superior.
Chapter 6:
Discussion of the Findings

How the seven humor-rhetoric variables of (i) Embodied Cognition, (ii) Location, (iii) Producer-Consumer Relation, (iv) Semiotic Mode, (v) Technique, (vi) Target, and (vii) Appeal accounted for rhetorical humor were analyzed in the previous chapter. In this chapter, how the results and interpretations, for each humor-rhetoric variable, relate to the existing literature are discussed from sections 6.1 to 6.7. Apart from the findings, relevant methodological issues that are important are discussed.

6.1 Discussing Embodied Cognition [When]

The variable of Embodied Cognition was analyzed based on laughter instances and humor-rhetoric moments (i.e. laughter instances that were audible for at least 2000ms). During the 57 WCPS® speeches analyzed, there were 873 unique laughter instances of which 262 were humor-rhetoric (laughter) moments. Primarily two statistically significant results emerged, which are now discussed in relation to the existing literature.

First, laughter instances were not equally distributed across time-periods, \( \chi^2 (5, N = 810) = 24.19, p < .001 \). At a false positive probability percentage of < 0.1%, there were significantly more laughter instances in the (middle) 2\textsuperscript{nd} to 3\textsuperscript{rd} minute time-period and significantly fewer laughter instances in the (ending) 5\textsuperscript{th} to 6\textsuperscript{th} minute time-period, relative to the other minute periods.
The finding that there were significantly fewer laughter instances in the (ending) 5th to 6th minute time-period, relative to the other minute periods, is in line with the empirical results of Chan (2011). Chan (ibid.) analyzed 356 television commercials for their inductive content and placement of humor and reported that the percentage of humor placement in only the first half of a commercial (i.e. 22.5%) doubled the percentage of humor placement in only the second half of a commercial (i.e. 11.3%); humor was most prevailingly placed throughout the entire time-period of analysis (i.e. 66.2% of humorous commercials had humor placed in both the first half and second half of a commercial). Chan (ibid.) discusses that humor is significantly placed at the communicative start, rather than at the ending period, to capture attention or placed throughout the entire time-period of analysis to hold attention. To discuss why this dataset contained significantly fewer laughter instances in the ending period, I conjecture that some WCPS® speakers may have wanted their public speech to end on a more serious note. For example, 15F10 who won 1st place in the 2015 WCPS® provoked the audience to laugh for 20 times in the first four minutes of his speech, but there were only 2 laughter instances in the ending three minutes of his speech. The content in the ending minutes of his speech was more serious and less laughter-inducing when he spoke about the death of his friend. To inspire the audience with a call to action, 15F10 was communicatively serious in his rhetorical ending and declared solemnly, “It's clear that a single word could have saved this life. Words have power. Words are power. Words could be your power. … Your mouth can spit venom, or it can mend a broken soul. Ladies and gentlemen: Let that be our goal. Contest chair.” Apart from 15F10, a substantial number of WCPS® speakers (e.g. 13F8, 16F2, 16F8, etc.) evidently crafted their
rhetoric to have less laughter at the ending period of their WCPS® speech for their speech to end on a more serious note.

To discuss the other finding that there were significantly more laughter instances in the (middle) 2nd to 3rd minute time-period relative to the other minute periods, I reviewed the literature and am not able to find past research that empirically documented laughter to be significantly more in the middle time-period of analysis. However, to offer a conjecture, the genre of Toastmasters speeches whereby stories are told as a rhetorical means for laughter would be a contributing reason. Stories about people were evident in all of the 57 speeches and it takes time for the narrative arc in stories to build into laughter. For example, during the speech by 17F3, laughter by the audience started off slow with only 2 laughter instances (both of which were audible for less than 1000ms) in the first minute of his speech when 17F3 was establishing the backstory of how he became a licensed funeral director. After the foundation of his story is set up, laughter by the audience began to build and peak in frequency at the middle period of his rhetoric with relatively fewer laughter instances at the ending period of his rhetoric. Unlike the genre of a standup comedy act, where the speaker igniting the audience to laugh regularly (and quickly) is expected, there is less expectations for a speaker at a Toastmasters setting to quickly make the audience laugh during the first minute or to make the audience laugh during the last minute. Moreover, as guided by the judging criteria (which is detailed in Appendix D), Toastmasters speakers are expected to deliver a message that is meaningful. To be humorous, or to make the audience laugh, is not required or explicitly necessary in the scoring rubric of an effective speech delivery.
Second, the percentage of laughter instances being humor-rhetoric moments in a
minute interval increased in a significant and linear manner, with every minute
increase in speech time, \( r_s(6) = +1.00, p < .001 \). For the 6 minute-intervals of ‘0ms
to 1st minute’, ‘1st to 2nd minute’, ‘2nd to 3rd minute’, ‘3rd to 4th minute’, ‘4th to 5th
minute’, ‘5th to 6th minute’ analyzed, the percentage of laughter instances being
humor-rhetoric moments in a minute interval consecutively increased from 23.2% to
25.2% to 30.2% to 30.8% to 33.3% to 37.1%. This means that, the longer that a
speaker spoke, the more likely that laughter by the audience had a recorded duration
of at least 2000ms. Possibly, the WCPS® speakers paced, strategized and crafted
their most humorous rhetoric to progressively surface as their speech progresses.
Also, it is possible that the audience could be trusting a speaker's intention more as
time passes for them to laugh more heartedly at a speaker’s rhetoric. Some scholars
have associated the reaction of laughter as related to trust. Buckley (2005) argues
that “listeners who laugh take the jester’s side against the butt and cement a
relationship of trust between themselves and the teller” (p. 208). Pinker (1997)
postulates that laughter carries information and the involuntary nature of laughter
suggests trust in the information stimulus (p. 545-550). Bryant & Aktipis (2014)
contends that “spontaneous laughter originates from a highly conserved play
signaling system shared by our closest primate relatives” and displays of laughter
“function to guide adaptive behavior in receivers in the form of trust and
cooperation” (p. 334). For this dataset, the exact minute-interval that all laughter
instances and laughter moments manifested in are directly verifiable and are
transparently documented\(^1\) in the Online Appendix (i.e. bit.ly/ntuphd_Appendix). The
fact that 23.23% of laughter instances were laughter moments in the ‘0ms to 1st

\(^{1}\) A ‘Raw Data' Excel Spreadsheet is included in the Online Appendix for cross-verification.
minute’ time-period while 38.6% of laughter instances were laughter moments in the ‘6th to 7th minute’ time-period and that every minute-interval in-between had a consecutive increase in ratio percentage\(^1\) indicates that the likelihood for laughter moments was more muted in the beginning before gradually increasing with time.

To discuss this observation, I conjecture that as a rhetoric progresses in time, propensity for laughter moments can be increased if an audience’s trust in a speaker’s intention is steadily built. This is because most of the sitting-audience were likely hearing each WCPS\(^\circledR\) speaker speak for the first time in each WCPS\(^\circledR\) speech. Personally trusting that the speaker-on-stage does not have a bad agenda following up would facilitate authentic, reactionary, rapturous laughter to flow more easily. If a person feels guarded or unsure about the motives of the speaker and where the rhetoric is going, to involuntarily open up genuinely in boisterous laughter would be conceivably difficult.

### 6.2 Discussing Location [Where]

The variable of Location was analyzed based on how the variability and similarity of the physical setting, social environment and cultural backdrop impacted the use of humor in rhetoric. Because all WCPS\(^\circledR\) from 2012 to 2017 were administrated by the Toastmasters organization, the cultural backdrop was mostly similar and no significant difference in laughter instances and humor-rhetoric moments among the 6 WCPS\(^\circledR\) locations emerged.

Although not significantly so, what is striking is that much fewer laughter moments per speech occurred at the 2012 WCPS\(^\circledR\) location, which was held in Orlando,

\(^1\) The summarized details are provided in Table 5.4 (in section 5.1).
Florida, when compared to the 2016 WCPS®. At the 2012 WCPS® location, an average of 2.22 humor-rhetoric moments were recorded per speech while at the 2016 WCPS® location in Washington, D. C., 6.20 humor-rhetoric moments were recorded in each speech. The random differences in the composite speeches at the 2012 WCPS® in comparison to the composite speeches at the 2016 WCPS® might be an influencing reason, but I would like to suggest that both the social environment and physical setting of the location were influencing factors too. Most notably, the audience at the 2012 WCPS® were seated far from the stage unlike how close some audience members were to the stage at the 2016 WCPS®. (Please refer to the documentation of photos at the 2012 WCPS® versus the 2016 WCPS® in Supplementary Material 1 - http://bit.ly/ntuphd_SM1.) The social environment of how the audience were seated might have influenced how receptive the audience was to the humor-rhetoric. The physical distance also creates a relational distance between the speaker and audience. Quirk (2011), who interviewed ten British standup comedians to investigate how the features of a place impact comedic performance, reports a professional practitioner commenting that “to amplify the laughter”, it is important that “people feel close to the comic and they know that it’s not a theatre performance and that there’s going to be interaction” (p. 228). Most of the 2012 audience were interactively far from the speaker to conceivably laugh less readily. During the 2012 WCPS®, there were many empty spaces among people in the audience as well as much space separating the speaker from the audience. In addition, the 2012 WCPS® had bright lighting on both the audience and the speaker, unlike the darker (or no) lighting on the audience during the 2016 WCPS®. The physical setting in relation to lighting at the examined location might have influenced how ready the audience was to laugh. As reported by Quirk (ibid.), an
interviewed standup practitioner commented that it is important to have “lights down at the beginning, search light, intro music, announcements and stuff, it makes it really exciting” (p. 227). The lights down at the beginning, search lights, and intro music factually happened at the 2016 WCPS® but not at the 2012 WCPS® where bright lights were switched on throughout the entire event. The research by Quirk (ibid.) reports that “to amplify the laughter”, it is best if the physical setting be “**very dark**, lights only facing the stage” (p. 228; original emphasis). At the 2012 WCPS® location, it would seem that the physical setting of bright lights shining on the audience consistently did not create the best environmental mood for involuntary laughter moments to manifest readily.

6.3 Discussing Producer-Consumer Relation [Who]

The variable of Producer-Consumer Relation was analyzed based on (i) **who** produced the rhetorical humor, (ii) **who** consumed the rhetorical humor, and (iii) how their relational dynamic impacted how humor in rhetoric manifested. Most notably, the variability in gender (as reported in Tables 5.11 and 5.12) and in country represented (as reported in Tables 5.13 and 5.14) did not significantly impact humor-rhetoric, in terms of the quantity of laughter instances and the quantity of laughter moments manifested. Additionally, the evaluated-evaluator dynamic in the producer-consumer relation might have contributed to the jabs in rhetorical humor being disproportionately self-targeted rather than audience-targeted.

First, the speaker’s gender not significantly impacting laughter production is congruent with the empirical literature. For example, Crawford & Gressley (1991) asked 131 women and 72 men (aged 16 to 84 years old) about their humor
preferences and practices in a 68-item humor questionnaire to report “more gender similarities than differences” (p. 228). Nevo, Nevo & Leong (2001), asked 57 undergraduate females and 62 undergraduate males of Chinese origin (aged 19 to 26 years old) to answer three self-report humor questionnaires and did a cross-cultural comparison of the results obtained with the same questionnaires and methods administered to participants in the United States (Thorson & Powell, 1991) and Israel (Nevo, Nevo, & Libman, 1986) to report that cross-culturally, no gender differences emerged for participants self-report scores in the Coping Humor Scale (CHS) and the Production and Appreciation Scales of Humor (PASH). Martin & Kuiper (1999) asked 30 women and 50 men (aged 17 to 79 years old) to complete a daily laughter record for three days along with three self-report measures to report that “men and women do not differ in the frequency which they laughed” but men and women “laugh at different things” (p. 355). Thereafter, Kotthoff (2006b) published a state-of-the-art review on the relationship between gender and humor and provided many illustrations of how males and females have “different forms of joking” (p. 10) that quantitative studies cannot capture. For example, Kotthoff (2006b) commented that jokes by females tend to be more subtle and sarcastic, whereas jokes by males tend to be less subtle and direct in ridicule. Taken together, it is conceivable that the consumers of men and women in the Toastmasters-Audience laugh at different things (e.g. relatively more women may laugh in 17F3.29 when 17F3 spoke about, “trying to keep it family friendly” while relatively more men may laugh in 17F3.31 when 17F3 shouted, “Leave the man be!”). However, there is no way that the methodology of this study can verify so without an over-extrapolation of its results. It is also conceivable that the male and female WCPS® speakers have different forms of joking. However, there is no statistical
evidence that emerged to indicate that the gender difference in speakers resulted in significantly different Techniques used (e.g. frequency in which the Technique of ‘Sarcasm’, ‘Slapstick’, ‘Irony’ was used), or significantly different Targets (e.g. frequency in which the Speaker is the butt for laughter) when humor in rhetoric is produced. The statistical results in this study evidently point to more gender similarities than gender differences, which is in line with the research of Crawford & Gressley (1991). Gender differences in the production and appreciation of humorous laughter in the winning Toastmasters’ speeches, if any, are covert (i.e. cannot be immediately observed) rather than overt (i.e. obviously observable).

Second, the country that a WCPS® speaker represented not significantly influencing humor production is congruent with the existing literature. Cross-cultural studies do show that humor appreciation can be different based on nationality differences (e.g. Davis, 2006; Davis, 2016; Davis & Chey, 2013), but there are no cross-cultural studies arguing that humor production ability is more pronounced in one country than in another country. Individual differences are consistently implied in the literature to be more explanatory of humor production ability than the demographic differences of gender, ethnicity, or nationality. For example, humor production ability (which was measured by an individual’s ability to generate funny ideas in a cartoon-captioning task) was investigated by Greengross, Martin & Miller (2012) and the results indicate that professional comedians (n = 31) had significantly better humor production ability than college students (n = 400), possibly due to their personality traits of significantly higher “Openness to Experience” and significantly lower “Conscientiousness”. Notably, the participants in this study by Greengross, Martin & Miller (ibid.) included a diverse mix of Native Americans, Hispanic
Americans, non-Americans and other ethnic minorities. In a separate study, Nusbaum, Silvia & Beaty (2017) investigated the same concept of humor production ability (which was measured this time by an individual’s ability to generate funny ideas on the spot in three humor production tasks) and the personality variable of “Openness to Experience” (which was measured by the same personality Big Five Inventory questionnaire) significantly predicted humor ability again. The 166 participants in the study by Nusbaum, Silva & Beaty (ibid.) were Caucasian (49%), African American (31%), Asian (12%) and women (77%). In these two studies, what is relevant is that demographic differences in ethnicity, nationality, and gender had no impact on the investigated variable of humor production ability. Generally, the statistical results in this study concurred with the existing literature in that the variability in pre-existing demographic qualities among the 57 speakers did not significantly impact humor production.

Third, the humor-rhetoric jabs in the 57 WCPS® speeches were disproportionately self-targeted rather than audience-targeted. Rhetorical humor that resulted in laughter moments disproportionately jabbed at the speaker (n = 104) more so than at the audience (n = 6). This emerged finding differs markedly from the research in conversational humor analysis whereby to directly poke fun at whom you are speaking to is a proportionate and recurring occurrence in everyday, light-hearted conversations for laughter (Norrick, 1993). The prologue of Chapter 1 documented as well how the public-speaking humor by Russell Peters proportionately jabs at the audience for laughter. Indians in the audience were mocked for their faces, accent and cheapness, while white people in the audience were mocked for getting angry easily and for their propensity to buy beer and to use expletives readily. To
conjecture why the laughter jabs in this dataset *disproportionately* targeted the producer more so than the consumer, the speaker-audience relation that consists of an evaluated-evaluator dynamic would be an influencing reason. During the presentation of the 57 speeches analyzed, 14 anonymous judges were scattered among the audience every year to evaluate, score, and rank each WCPS® speech for its inspirational qualities. Only rhetorical performances that were cumulatively evaluated to rank in the top three in their respective year would be accoladed with prizes. Because there was an evaluated-evaluator dynamic embedded in the relational setting, to directly poke fun at the unknown evaluators among the audience who are ranking ‘you’ is risky enough to conceivably result in fewer jabs at the audience consuming the rhetorical humor.

6.4 Discussing Semiotic Mode [Which]

The variable of Semiotic Mode was analyzed based on scrutinizing how the meaning-making modes of (i) Language, (ii) Visual, and (iii) Audio denote rhetorical humor. Most notably, in 225 of the 262 humor-rhetoric moments documented (i.e. 85.8%), laughter moments were triggered by the semiotic interplay of Language + Visual + Audio signifiers. Additionally, Appendix A was importantly produced and no swear words were evident in the 57 transcripts of the WCPS® speeches.

Investigating which language words, visual images, and audio-elements meaningfully precede each humor-rhetoric moment produced Appendix A (which is also accessible online at: [http://bit.ly/ntuphd_Appendix](http://bit.ly/ntuphd_Appendix)). Appendix A is important because by denoting the overt, physical *signifiers* used in rhetorical humor,
documentary evidence is available to analyze the Technique, Target, and Appeal that were conceptually connoted and covertly *signified* by the *sign* of laughter. Glaringly, the denotations of Semiotic Modes in this study are not micro-methodological in their detailing when contrasted with past semiotic studies and multimodal research. For example, Lwin (2010) coded in detail every visual gesture used in an oral storytelling performance in terms of mimic gestures (i.e. bodily movements to enact actions), metaphoric gestures (i.e. representational movements to depict abstract ideas), deictic gestures (i.e. motioning at concrete objects or physical spaces), and beats (i.e. rhythmical moves of the hand that pulsated according to the speech). Francesconi (2017) analyzed how the inter-semiosis in a YouTube video enacted humor through the semiotic details of color, empty spaces, angles-of-view, as well as synchronic (i.e. meanings in the present moment) and diachronic (i.e. meanings across time) syntagmatic elements. Attardo, Pickering & Baker (2011) analyzed the prosodic and multimodal marker of humor in conversation by precisely detailing the tone units’ differences in terms of speech rate (which was calculated and reported via number of syllables uttered per second), pitch (which was measured and reported in terms of hertz), and volume (which was measured and reported in terms of decibels). Nevertheless, although the detailing of the visual and audio signifiers was not micro-methodological, this study was systematically conducted. All the English language words in the 57 WCPS® speeches were transcribed. Only when ≥ 2000ms of laughter manifested were visual and audio signifiers examined. If no noticeable audio variation was heard when the speaker delivered the punchline, it was faithfully reported (e.g. in 14F3.14, 15F5.8, 16F9.22, etc.). If no noticeable visual variation was seen that preceded the ≥ 2 seconds of laughter, it was objectively documented (e.g. in 14F9.2, 16F9.1, 17F6.5 when the speaker simply stood normally when
saying the punchline). The semiotic observations of language, visual, and audio signifiers reported in Appendix A are rudimentary, but are straightforward, directly observable, and uncomplicated to a general reader. The filter-enabled function in online Appendix A allows readers to quickly sort “Which form of semiotic play triggered rhetorical humor?” in terms of alphabetical order. The color-coded documentation also allows readers to swiftly distinguish among the Language, (Visual), [Audio] components that triggered rhetorical humor. Additionally, Appendix A provides the documentary reference for the covert analysis of Technique, Target and Appeal.

The research on swear words widely acknowledges that using vulgarities facilitates humor and stimulates laughter (Norrick, 2012). For example, Fägersten (2012, p. 46) reports that swearing utterances by females in mixed-sex conversations “earned laughter reactions 55% of the time” (out of the 394 total utterances analyzed). However, even though there are no specific rules\(^1\) that disallow swearing in Toastmasters’ speeches, no swear words were used by the 57 WCPS® speakers in all 57 transcripts, as documented in Supplementary Material 2 (which is also accessible at: http://bit.ly/ntuphd_SM2). To conjecture why the explicit use of profanity was not utilized by all WCPS® speakers despite its (known) power to induce laughter, the cultural norms regulating the Toastmasters community would be an influencing reason. Toastmasters International (TI®) brands itself as an organization of people that speaks professionally ("Welcome to Toastmasters International", 2018). Members are implicitly expected to be professional, respectful, and competent in

\(^1\) The 2017 Toastmasters Speech Contest Rulebook can be viewed at http://bit.ly/ntuphd_rules, which explains the judging process as well.
their communication. Therefore, unlike a standup comedian in a bar setting in which using profanity to mock people and the social order for laughter is conventionally acceptable, WCPS® speakers evidently avoided using foul language for their humor in rhetoric. Instead, other Techniques to generate laughter were used, which the analysis in section 5.5 accounted for.

Apart from the important documentary evidence of Appendix A and Supplementary Material 2, examining the Semiotic Modes of rhetorical humor produced the finding that 85.8% of rhetorical laughter moments were triggered by the simultaneous play of words, images, and sound. This result that all three semiotic signifiers of language, visual, and audio are critical as the trigger sources of humor is in line with current research. Balirano (2013) examined how the spoken language of English and the subtitled words of Italian synergistically and antagonistically interact with audiovisual components in ‘The Big Bang Theory’ sitcom for an Italian audience. González (2017) examined the intertextual creation of humor for fourteen DreamWorks animated feature films when they were dubbed and subtitled into Spanish. Martínez-Sierra (2010) analyzed the comedy film, ‘I Want Candy’, to outline an Audio Description (AD) of humor by describing how the gaps and silences between dialogues are consequential for humorous fragments. Lamidi (2017) investigated how audiovisual codes (such as costumes, gestures and other paralinguistic features) interact with verbal codes in 500 minutes of Nigerian standup comedy to analyze the multimodal strategies associated with laughter creation. Taken together, current research consistently highlights the importance of analyzing (i) language words, (ii) images, and (iii) sound together as an influencing
cause of humor production.

6.5 Discussing Technique [What]

The variable of Technique was analyzed based on examining the means that most strikingly generated each humor-rhetoric moment. 40 of the 41 Techniques that Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004) particularized distinctly generated the 262 humor-rhetoric moments. The 262 laughter moments were also observed to be commonly generated by (i) play with meanings, (ii) appropriate incongruity, and (iii) wit in mockery.

First, it is necessary to state that section 5.5 reported (in Table 5.16) the specific Technique that most strikingly generated each laughter moment on a 1:1 ratio. Often, there is at least one specific Technique that more incontrovertibly generated the laughter moment. However, coding what strategic Technique most strikingly provoked each laughter moment is not always crystal-clear and required careful evaluation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which resulted in a laughter moment. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
<th>What Technique distinctively generated Laughter?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17F2.4</td>
<td>17F2 playacted that she was her mother speaking to her child-self.</td>
<td>'Exaggeration’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
close the door when you are walking in and out.

You are letting out the air that I **paid** for you to breathe. (Speaker frowned her eyebrows) [Speaker spoke in an annoyed tone] (Speaker shifted the direction of her upper body and crossed her arms.)

{Audience laughed for ≥ 2 seconds} [Mama, breathing is free.]

**17F.4** is an example of how coding the Technique that most distinctively generated laughter is not always crystal-clear, but there is still a strategic Technique that more unquestionably generated the laughter moment. In **17F2.4** (please see: https://youtu.be/mm4EUqolFYU?t=134), the Technique of ‘Imitation’, which is specified in Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004) as “Mimicking or copying someone’s appearance or movements, while keeping one’s own identity at the same time” (p. 153), was obvious but imitating her mother, in itself, was not what most strikingly generated the audience to laugh for ≥ 2000ms. The Technique of ‘Irony’, which is specified in Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004) as “Saying one thing and meaning something else or exactly the opposite of what you are saying” (p. 153), was also apparent. However, when 17F2’s mother said that she “paid” for the air that 17F2 is breathing, 17F2’s mother did not mean literally that she “paid” for the oxygen in the air. What 17F2’s mother presumably paid for was the house or the rented

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1 Living in a rented accommodation is plausible because 17F2 stated that her mother was a “single mom of two”, working “three jobs” as a cleaner, “who barely made enough” and had to “slave to take care” of 17F2 and her sibling.
accommodation that they are in. Although 17F2’s mother was being ironic in her words, it was not the irony in her words that most strongly generated this laughter moment. The Technique of ‘Exaggeration’, which is specified in Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004) as “Making an exaggeration or overstatement; reacting in an exaggerated way; exaggerating the qualities of a person or product” (p. 153), was evaluated to be the more incontrovertible technique that provoked 17F2.4. 17F2’s mother overstated and exaggerated that in paying for the accommodation that they were living in, she had also paid for the air in the accommodation/ room. Among ‘Imitation’, ‘Irony’, and ‘Exaggeration’, what generated 17F2.4 was more robustly\(^1\) the exaggeration by 17F2’s mother that she “paid” for 17F2 to breathe.

The above (footnoted) discussion is purposeful to emphasize the careful evaluation required to code on a 1:1 ratio the specific Technique that most strikingly provoked each laughter moment. A degree of uncertainty in the coding of what specific Technique distinctly generated each humor-rhetoric moment would, however, always be inherent. In the best peer-reviewed humor journals, research that applied Buijzen and Valkenburg’s (2004) framework of 41 humor techniques to their corpus of analysis also coded with a 1:1 ratio (e.g. Juckel, Bellman & Varan, 2016, Martínez-García, 2015).

\(^1\) An alternative interpretation is that 17F2’s mother meant that she paid for the air-conditioning in the room. However, if this interpretation is true, the Technique of ‘Irony’ will no longer be true because 17F2’s mother was saying what she meant. She did pay for the air. The Technique of ‘Exaggeration’ is, nevertheless, still robustly evident because 17F2’s mother was still overstating that she is paying for 17F2 to breathe when what she is precisely paying for is only the air-conditioning, which triggered 17F2 to retort immediately, “breathing is free”. However, the validity of this alternative interpretation is questionable because nothing about air-conditioning was mentioned (and if air-conditioning was the issue of debate, 17F2 would have said “I can breathe without air-conditioning”). There might be no air-conditioning in the (rented) accommodation that they were living in.
While differences emerged in what strategic means distinctively generated each laughter moment, similarities were also observed. All 262 laughter moments were observed to be commonly generated by (i) play with meanings, (ii) appropriate incongruity, and (iii) wit in mockery. The ways in which (i) play with meanings, (ii) appropriate incongruity, and (iii) wit in mockery were principally evident in laughter moments were elaborated in section 5.5 with five examples. This thematic observation is congruent with the scholarly literature. Scholars widely agree that laughter is induced by play (e.g. Boyd, 2004; Coates, 2007; Glenn, 2003; Grammer & Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1990; Vettin & Todt, 2005). How the semiotic stimulus of words, image, and sound trigger (mental) meaning-making play for laughter in rhetoric is detailed in Appendix A and explained in section 5.4. Besides semiotic play, scholars have also construed laughter as a response to (appropriate) incongruity (e.g. Forabosco, 1992; Hutcheson, 1758; Oring, 2016; Schopenhauer, 1819; Suls, 1972). The incongruity perspective of humor is well-established and is often applied as a theoretical position in empirical research (e.g. Heiser, 2016; Hempelmann & Attardo, 2011; Veale & Valitutti, 2017). Scholars have also explicated how laughter is generated by the behavior of wit (e.g. Long & Graesser, 1988; Rapp, 1951; Speier, 1998) and mockery (e.g. Billig, 2005; Haugh, 2014; Gruner, 2017). The thematic concepts of wit (i.e. the capacity to use words and ideas in a quick and inventive manner) and mockery (i.e. to ridicule, taunt, or deride) being critical to create laughter are frequently implied, rehashed and reinforced in the literature. For this dataset of 57 WCPS® speeches analyzed, three common ways and 40 distinctive Techniques (e.g. ‘Puns’, ‘Parody’, ‘Satire’, ‘Sarcasm’, ‘Conceptual Surprise’) were identified to have generated the 262 laughter moments.
6.6 Discussing Target [Whom]

The variable of Target was analyzed based on investigating how the content of rhetorical humor jabs at (or mocks) a single person, groups of people, and ideas/beliefs. The results revealed a wide spectrum of subject-matter being laughed about, but most prominently it was people (80.2% of the time) and the speaker (39.7% of the time) being the subject-matter of laughter.

First, it is necessary to state that section 5.6 reported (in Table 5.17) whom each rhetorical humor categorically Targeted on a 1:1 ratio. Compared to the 40 (or 41) possibilities of Techniques that generated humor-rhetoric, there were only seven categorical Targets of humor-rhetoric jabs that emerged. Therefore, the mathematical probability of making a random human error in the coding of rhetorical Targets, as compared to the coding of specific Techniques, is lower. However, in some humor-rhetoric moments, many subjects (or matters) were mentioned. Deciphering whom specifically did each humor-rhetoric jab at therefore required careful evaluation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laughter ID #</th>
<th>Semiotic stimulus which resulted in a laughter moment. The context before the Language, (Visual), [Audio] punchline is detailed in Grey.</th>
<th>Specific Target?</th>
<th>Categorical Target?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14F8.22</td>
<td>14F8 was speaking about the advice he gave to his 18-year-old son, Rohan.</td>
<td>Every</td>
<td>A Population</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rohan, most things in life are temporary. Every young man’s fascination with video games and dirt-biking and attractive girls disappears. **Okay I lied about the girls.**

[Speaker spoke the punchline rhythmically and sharply, which was a vocal variation that is discerned to deviate from his baseline]

(Speaker pointed with both of his index fingers to emphasize the point, and then kept only his left index finger pointed) {Audience laughed for $\geq 2$ seconds}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>young man</th>
<th>of People - Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**14F8.22** is an example of 9 subjects being mentioned in a humor-rhetoric, but there is still a prominent subject being jabbed at more strikingly than the other subjects. In **14F8.22** (please see: [https://youtu.be/asw8jtcjW6o?t=402](https://youtu.be/asw8jtcjW6o?t=402)), there were 9 specific subject-matters being mentioned, namely (i) “Rohan”, (ii) “most things in life are temporary”, (iii) “Every young man”, (iv) “fascination with video games”, (v) “dirt-biking”, (vi) “attractive girls disappear”, (vii) “I”, (viii) “I lied”, and (iv) “the girls”. However, there is a prominent subject that being jabbed at more clearly than the other subjects (or matters) being mentioned. The humor-rhetoric was evaluated to be **not** most strikingly jabbing at (i) Rohan, (ii) the temporality of things in life, (iii) video gaming fascination, (iv) dirt-biking, (v) attractive girls disappearing, (vi) the speaker, (vii) the speaker lying, and (viii) girls. Among the 9 subject-matters
specifically mentioned, “Every young man” was coded to be the most prominent Target being jabbed at. This humor-rhetoric was evaluated to be more strikingly jabbing at ‘A Population of People - Men’, under the category of “Laughter about people at a macro-level”. At a broad, macro-level, Men’s (both young and old across societies) fascination with attractive girls is made salient to be mocked for laughter in 14F8.22, rather than the humor-rhetoric particularly jabbing at individuals at a micro-level, such as Rohan’s fascinations, the speaker, or the speaker’s lie.

The above discussion seeks to emphasize the careful evaluation required to code on a 1:1 ratio the categorical Target in each laughter moment. Methodologically-speaking, even with inter-coder checks, a degree of uncertainty in the coding of whom each rhetorical humor most strikingly Targeted would, however, always be inherent. In peer-reviewed humor journals, empirical studies that examined the Targets of humor in their dataset also coded with a 1:1 ratio (e.g. Archakis & Tsakona, 2005; Hempelmann & Ruch, 2005; Ruch, Attardo & Raskin, 1993).

Coding the variable of Target requires the identification of the “butt of the joke” or the “subject of ridicule” (Attardo, 2002, p. 178). According to Attardo (2002), “groups or individuals” are often the “subject of ridicule” in jokes that are aggressive (p. 178). This assertion by Attardo (2002) is well-illustrated and supported by the results of this study. As elaborated with examples and detail in section 5.6, seven distinguishing Target categories, namely (i) the speaker (n = 104), (ii) another specified person (n = 47), (iii) specified people (n = 20), (iv) the audience (n = 6), (v) the relationships of people (n = 22), (vi) people at a macro-
level (n = 11), and (vii) ideas (n = 52), emerged to catalogue whom the 262 humor-rhetoric moments most prominently jabbed at. There were vastly more people-targeted humor-rhetoric (n = 210) than non-people targeted humor-rhetoric (n = 52). The results concur with Attardo (2002) that “groups or individuals” are indeed often the “subject of ridicule”. In 80.2% of the 262 humor-rhetoric moments analyzed, either a singular person or a group of people was most prominently the subject-matter of laughter. However, Attardo (2001, 2002, 2017) maintains that non-humans (e.g. “trees”, “cows”) must not be labeled as a Target of humor because jokes are people-related and jokes that are non-aggressive do not have a Target; if there is no clear Target without aggression, there is simply no Target. The empirical papers cited in the previous paragraph, that is Archakis & Tsakona (2005), Hempelmann & Ruch (2005), and Ruch, Attardo & Raskin (1993), were methodologically similar in that they coded an empty value for jokes that were non-aggressive. This study, however, did not code an empty value for non-aggressive humor. Jabs that were targeted at non-humans (e.g. a car “doing push-ups” in 13F9.22, a dollar bill chuckling in 15F4.10, and a spiritual retreat “called Burger King” in 13F8.12) were regarded as jabs at ideas (or beliefs). How non-aggressive humor resulted in laughter about non-humans (e.g. laughter about a peculiar sound “Nngg, nngg, nngg” in 13F9.7 and 13F9.14, and laughter about “Love” when the humor-rhetoric jabs at love in 14F8.23: https://youtu.be/asw8jtcjW6o?t=429) are detailed in Appendix A. The data in this study documented how 19.8% of humor-rhetoric moments were not aggressively directed at humans for laughter. This is aligned with Karman (1998) who argues that “ideological targets” such as jabs at institutions (e.g. “the establishment”) and jabs at abstract concepts (e.g. “romantic love”) should be included in an expanded view of Targets in humor. This study also stands with
Oring (2003, 2011, 2016) who explains in detail his disagreements with Attardo’s insistence (2001, 2002, 2017) that “a joke in which there is no aggression has no target” (Oring, 2016, p. 20). Mainly, this study adopted a broader definition of the word/variable ‘Target’ and regarded humor to be both aggressive and affiliative, without methodologically differentiating between them. The variable of Target was coded based on inquiring: “Whom (be it human or non-human) was most strikingly being jabbed at (be it aggressively or non-aggressively), for there to be laughter about which specified incongruous/deviant subject (or matter) mentioned in the humor-rhetoric?” Rather than code an empty value of Target for non-aggressive humor (to systematically disregard its presence), constructing the inquiry in this (expanded) manner allowed me to report how every humor-rhetoric is a jab at someone, or something.

According to Miczo, Averbeck, & Mariani (2009), ‘laughing at’ people is more directed and has aggression in its connotation, whereas ‘laughing about’ people is more encompassing and can include both aggressive humor and affiliative humor. Therefore, the phrasing that "there was laughter about"\(^1\) is a deliberate and constant feature in section 5.6, so as to encompass both affiliative humor (defined widely as: a style of humor that is benevolent when it positively amuses people to ease tension or enhance relationships) and aggressive humor (defined widely as: a style of humor that is potentially detrimental to relationships when it hurts or belittles others). Not

\(^1\) To report that "there was laughter at" would imply that the laughter by the audience is aggressively-directed to (methodically) overlook that some audience’s laughter can be non-aggressive. To report that “the audience laughed about” or “the audience laughed at” would affirm that the results can speak on behalf of the audience members. The phrasing that "there was laughter about ..." is therefore relatively more accurate and defensible because there was indeed laughter about someone, or some idea, in each laughter moment analyzed.
differentiating between aggressive and ‘affiliative’ styles of humor is important because, according to Billig (2005, 2018), positive ideologues of humor dangerously obscure how the first principle of humor and laughter resides in (social) ridicule. Billig (2018) writes strongly against the “ideological positivism” towards humor that he observes to be increasing. “The widespread positive evaluation of humour in today’s popular and academic psychology sentimentalize the supposed goodness of humour to overlook, and even repress, the negatives” (Billig, 2005, p. 5). Other eminent scholars who do not methodically differentiate between aggressive and ‘affiliative’ humor include Davies (1990, 1998, 2002, 2011a), who regards the humor in jokes as centrally “play with aggression”, and Gruner (1978, 2017), who explains humor and laughter in terms of how they foundationally degrade and disparage individuals and ideas. As such, this study did not conceptualize humor to be differentiated by its style (and function) of affiliation or aggression and aimed a component of its analysis at the foundational mechanism of how in every laughter moment, someone or something was being jabbed (i.e. ridiculed) for laughter.

6.7 Discussing Appeal [Why]

The variable of Appeal was analyzed based on deconstructing why humor as rhetoric is logically, emotionally, and characterologically attractive in a persuasive manner to result in sustained durations of laughter. I argued that ‘Humor as rhetoric is appealing for the individuals who laughed when a shift in cognition brings affective pleasure to enlarge a laughers’s ego’. Five crucial issues must be discussed.

First and most importantly, the concept of pleasure must be clearly described. This study adopts the Epicureanism view of pleasure which defines and specifies (the
greatest) “pleasure as the absence of pain or fear” (Annas, 1987; Long 1986; Shusterman, 2016). This means that laughter is pleasurable insofar as it minimizes pain, anxiety, discomfort, or suffering. In section 5.7, 13 humor-rhetoric moments, specifically (i) 17F3.4, (ii) 17F3.5, (iii) 17F3.11, (iv) 17F3.12, (v) 17F3.15, (vi) 17F3.16, (vii) 17F3.20, (viii) 17F3.23, (ix) 17F3.24, (x) 17F3.29, (xi) 17F3.31, (xii) 17F3.33, and (xiii) 17F3.35 were affectively analyzed; I drew attention to how the feeling of (i) relief, (ii) superiority, (iii) surprise, (iv) amusement, (v) non-seriousness, (vi) not feeling, (vii) schadenfreude joy, (viii) fear, (ix) play, (x) pain, (xi) mirth, (xii) trust, and (xiii) disgust can lead to pleasure in laughter respectively. How relief, superiority, play, and mirth (which is specified as an amalgam of amusement, surprise, joy) are reflected in laughter are notably explained by Freud (1905), Gruner (2017), Boyd (2004), and Martin (2007) deferentially. How “the feeling of non-seriousness” conceptually binds humor and laughter is prominently explicated in Chafe (2007). How the feeling of not feeling brings laughter is famously explained by Bergson (1911) who observes that laughter “demands a momentary anesthesia of the heart” (p. 5). How trust facilitates authentic, reactionary, rapturous laughter to flow more readily is discussed in section 6.1 and asserted in Jung (2003) that “laughter signals trust” (p. 229). Lastly, pain and disgust can directly bring (Epicureanism) pleasure if the act of laughing is able to reduce fear, anxiety or suffering. Darwin (1896) commented that “in joy, the face expands” but “in grief, it lengthens” and that these patterns of facial expression are found in “all races of man” (p. 213). This means that, from an evolutionary science perspective, the universal expansion of the face in laughter suggests pleasure or ‘joy’ being felt more so than pain or ‘grief’ (Goldstein, Fry & Salameh, 1987). Evidently, in authentically laughing spontaneously, discomfort from fear or suffering is reduced.
when (expressed) joy uplifts.

Second in importance, the character analysis of humor must be delineated clearly. There are broadly three ways to conceptualize the character analysis of humor, namely (i) the character of the producer, (ii) the character of the semiotic content, and/or (iii) the character of the consumer. To be simplistic and reductionist, the character appeal of humor can be analyzed in terms of (i) the wit of the producer, (ii) the semiotic mockery of character (i.e. a person, groups of people, or beliefs), and/or (iii) the consumer's ego being enlarged. Therefore, one way to simplistically explain the overall character appeal of humor is to perceive it as chiefly residing in ‘the wit of a producer mocking the character of a person, groups of people, or beliefs to enlarge a consumer's ego’. However, wit in mockery is mainly answering the (content) question of "What makes people laugh?" rather than the (covert) question of "Why do people laugh?" Therefore, for the characterological inquiry of why, I focus on (most plausibly) interpreting why humor is appealing for ‘the character of the consumer’ with the most incisive means that I know. Based on a Psychodynamics framework, I conceptualize a consumer’s character in terms of ego and argue that humor is characterologically appealing because it can enlarge (i.e. expand, boost, or uplift) the consumer's ego. Aside from stimulating in consumers a mental cognitive-shift and affective pleasure from feelings, I conjecture that for a producer to incite people to laugh for ≥ 2000ms, enlarging a consumer’s peculiar ego (which is not necessarily easy) is also implicitly necessary.

Third, my ego-enlargement conjecture to explain the consumer-character component of laughter is closely related to the superiority perspective of humor and the relief
perspective of humor. *Superiority* and *relief* are two of the three pillars to classically explain laughter (Attardo, 1994; Martin; 2007; Raskin, 1985). The *superiority* perspective of humor is widely regarded to be pathed by Hobbes (1650/1999) who explains that: “The passion of laughter is nothing else but a sudden glory arising from the sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmities of others, or with our own formerly” (p. 54-55). The ego-enlargement conjecture stands with the *superiority* perspective; an egoistic laugh can arise from the *direct* pathway of uplifting laughers to feel superior through relative comparison. Separately, the *relief* perspective of humor is widely regarded to stem from Freud (1905) who explains laughter in terms of the psychodynamic relief-and-release it offers for suppressed desires. The ego-enlargement conjecture is rooted in the same psychodynamic analytic framework of *id*, *superego*, *ego* that Freud employs; relief-and-release is intrinsic in an *egoistic* laugh that arises from the dynamics between conscious and unconscious drives. Freud (1905) emphasizes the unconscious power of the *id*, but I emphasize the executive-mediator power of the *ego*. I argue that an egoistic laugh can arise from the *realistic* pathway of appealing to self-interest and the *psychodynamic* pathway of resonating with the id and not offending the superego. The three pathways in which a consumer’s *ego* can be *enlarged* were explained with 13 humor-rhetoric examples in section 5.7. ‘Not offending the superego’ is a crucial aspect of the ego-enlargement conjecture. The *superiority* perspective of humor explains that relative superiority arises because someone or something is being ridiculed, mocked, or degraded (Gruner, 1978, 2017). Therefore, before embodied laughter is reactionarily released, it is paramount that the mockery inherent in the rhetorical content does not offend a moralistic ideal, an ethical ‘should’, or a serious conviction residing in an idiosyncratic mind. Synergistically,
the ego-enlargement conjecture associates the pillars of *superiority* and *relief* together to explain laughter in rhetoric.

Fourth, my ego-enlargement conjecture to explain the consumer-character component of laughter is *most* applicable to the reaction of embodied laugher when consuming a rhetorical monologue but *not* applicable to laughter in interactional conversations. The ego-enlargement conjecture conceptualizes all idiosyncratic laughter as egoistic. Egoistic laughter is fundamentally *self-orientated* which means that the action/reaction of laughter is based on a laugher’s (self-centered) interests rather than for the (altruistic) interests of others. Non-egoistic laughter, on the contrary, is *other-oriented* which means that an act of laughing is for the interests of other(s). The ego-enlargement conjecture does not categorically consider that laughter can be non-egoistic in its conjecture. Therefore, in specifying that laughter reflects a self-centered ego boost for the laugher, this conjecture is less applicable to laughter during social interactions. For example, in the social context of speed-dating, a woman may voluntarily laugh at a man’s ‘humor’ not to (involuntarily) boost her own ego but to (altruistically) boost the man’s ego in a conversation.

Fifth, the cognitive-shift explanation in this study to account for the logical-component of laughter is closely related to the *incongruity* perspective of humor. The three pillars to classically explain laughter are the approaches of *superiority*, *incongruity*, and *relief* (Attardo, 1994; Martin; 2007; Raskin, 1985). The *incongruity* perspective of humor is widely regarded to be first paved by Hutcheson (1758) who explains laughter as a response to the perception of incongruity. Schopenhauer (1819) is also acknowledged as one of the pioneering forefathers as he elaboratively
detailed how perceived incongruity resides in between a concept and the real object it represents. However, according to Carrell (2008), Billig (2005) and Morreall (1987, 2009a), the most famous scholar who propelled the incongruity explanation of humor is Kant (1790) who called wit “the play of thought” (p. 176). Kant (ibid.) famously explains that laughter “is an affection arising from sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing” (p. 177). What is relevant is the conceptualization of wit, trailblazed by Kant, and the “affection” of laughter being brought about by a “sudden” transformation in expectation; Kant (1790) spotlights the necessary condition of ‘suddenness’ that Hutcheson (1758) and Schopenhauer (1819) did not. According to Ritchie (2018), the emphasis on ‘suddenness’ is critical for a split-second shift in cognition to result in the reflex of laughter as it entails a forced re-interpretation or a quick reconceptualization. The cognitive-shift explanation of laughter is a culminative scholarly work, refined by scholars over 200 years (Morreall, 2009a). Morreall (2009a, 2009b) neatly synthesizes and explains how “a shift in cognition” constitutes an incongruity perspective to explain laughter. How “a shift in cognition” accounts for the logical appeal in 13 humor-rhetoric moments was elaborated in section 5.7. The interpretation that “Individuals laughed when a shift in cognition brings affective pleasure to enlarge a laughers’ ego” aligns with the scholarly literature through standing with Epicureanism and harmonizing superiority, incongruity, and relief to classically explain laughter in rhetoric.
Chapter 7:
Conclusion

The conclusion chapter consists of five sections. In section 7.1, I synopsize the main results, interpretations and discussion of the findings. In sections 7.2, 7.3 and 7.4, I acknowledge the limitations, highlight the significance, and outline future directions of research. In section 7.5, I close the thesis by reviewing if the research has met its objective and end with an epilogue that ties back to the prologue of Russell Peters’ rhetorical humor.

7.1 How Humor was Used as Rhetoric in the 57 WCPS® Speeches

To examine how humor was used as rhetoric in 57 finalists’ speeches at the World Championship of Public Speaking®, the (i) ‘when’, (ii) ‘where’, (iii) ‘who’, (iv) ‘which’, (v) ‘what’, (vi) ‘whom’, and (vii) ‘why’ of rhetorical humor were inquired, analyzed and discussed. It was necessary to thoroughly investigate all seven WH-inquiries so as to collate multiple datapoints for a comprehensive assessment of rhetorical humor. Broadly, the holistic results and interpretations of this study do not disagree with the scholarly literature and builds on it via the findings it provided, through a modern dataset of 57 speeches that exemplified competency in rhetoric.

How audience laughter surfaced in terms of its (i) occurrence, (ii) duration, and (iii) distribution across time during 57 WCPS® speeches were scrutinized. Most notably, this dataset contained significantly more laughter instances in the (middle) 2nd to 3rd minute time-period and significantly fewer laughter instances in the (ending) 5th to 6th minute time-period, relative to the other minute periods, which I discussed as
respectively due to the narrative arc of stories requiring time to build into laughter and some WCPS® speakers devising their speech to be more serious towards the end for rhetorical impact. Additionally, the percentage of laughter instances being humor-rhetoric moments in a minute interval increased in a significant and linear manner with every minute increase in speech time, which I discussed as conceivably due to trust in a speaker’s intention that is gradually built.

How the locational setting and the relational setting at the WCPS® impacted how humor in rhetoric manifested were thereafter examined. There was no significant difference in laughter instances and humor-rhetoric moments among the 6 WCPS® locations, as well as no significant difference in the quantity of laughter instances and humor-rhetoric moments produced based on the demographic attributes of ‘gender’ and ‘country represented’. The physical setting, social environment, cultural backdrop, and producer-consumer relation mostly impacted rhetorical humor in a qualitative manner that quantitative analysis cannot capture.

How humor-as-rhetoric moments were triggered by the semiotic play of language, visual, and audio signifiers were tangibly documented in Appendix A. Most notably, in 225 of the 262 humor-rhetoric moments observed (i.e. 85.8%), rhetorical laughter moments were elicited by the play in words, images, and sound, simultaneously co-occurring. Emphasizing the scrutiny of all three meaning-making signifiers of language, visual, and audio as being critical to uncover how humor is produced is in synchrony with current research (e.g. Balirano, 2013; González, 2017; Lamidi, 2017; Martínez-Sierra, 2010).
How the 262 humor-rhetoric moments were distinctly generated by 40 particularized Techniques, but thematically observed to be commonly generated by (i) play with meanings, (ii) appropriate incongruity, and (iii) wit in mockery was highlighted. Furthermore, how the content of every humor-rhetoric moment inherently contains the mockery of a person (n = 151), people (n = 59), or ideas (n = 52), were detailed. I discussed that analyzing what Technique most strikingly generated rhetorical humor and whom each rhetorical humor most strikingly Targeted would always implicate a degree of uncertainty; careful evaluation is required if a 1:1 coding methodology for Technique or Target is adopted (e.g. in Archakis & Tsakona, 2005; Hempelmann & Ruch, 2005; Juckel, Bellman & Varan, 2016, Martínez-García, 2015; Ruch, Attardo & Raskin, 1993).

Lastly, how humor was rhetorically appealing in terms of (i) logic, (ii) emotion, and (iii) character, from the point of view of a consumer, were deconstructed. How humor-rhetoric moments connoted (i) a shift in cognition, bringing about (ii) affective pleasure, to (iii) enlarge a laughers’s ego, for the individuals who laughed, was explained with 13 humor-rhetoric examples in the speech by 17F3. I discussed that (i) the cognitive-shift explanation is based on the incongruity perspective of humor, (ii) the affective-pleasure explanation is based on the Epicureanist view of pleasure and Darwinian science which regards the facial expansion intrinsic in laughter to cross-culturally signal joy, and (iii) the ego-enlargement conjecture is based on the superiority and relief perspectives of humor for a holistic synthesis of laughter in rhetoric that aligns the classics to address a modern dataset.

7.2 Limitations of the Study
There are five main limitations of the study. First, the interpretation of laughter is limited to embodied laughter that is unforced when consuming a rhetorical monologue. Laughter in this study was analyzed based on the assumption that audible laughter was involuntarily produced because a rhetorical stimulus triggered an involuntary mind-body connection. The logical, emotional, and character appeals implicative when one is spontaneously laughing during a rhetorical monologue do not freely extend to laughter in other contexts. When one is forcibly tickled, the response of laughter would not necessarily mean affective pleasure is felt. When one partakes in the social practice of laughter yoga, the behavior of mindlessly laughing would not sufficiently indicate that an incongruity perception resulted in laughter due to a cognitive-shift. When one tells a story and sporadic laughter leaks, the unforced laughter may be due to the direct relief it provides in reducing guilt, embarrassment or nervousness, rather than superiority felt due to an ego-boost driving the laughter. The usefulness of the laughter findings in this study is limited to the particular context that it was applied to. Caution is required to not over-extrapolate the stated appeals of laughter in rhetoric to other contexts.

Second, this study analyzed humor and rhetoric at the WCPS® setting without interviewing the WCPS® speakers and audience. No WCPS® speaker or audience member at the WCPS® was interviewed for their personal point of view to be factored into the study. This limitation arises when a researcher does not have access to the speakers and audience who were at the WCPS®, but it can be mitigated if a researcher attends a WCPS® in-person to disseminate questionnaires and to directly interview WCPS® speakers and audience for their views of humor in rhetoric.
Third, this study assumes logic, emotion, and character components to be (implicatively) intrinsic in humor. Many scholars have, however, specified the construct of humor only in terms of cognition (e.g. Palmer, 1987; Schopenhauer, 1819; Suls, 1972; Raskin, 1985). From this perspective, perceiving humor does not strictly imply connotations of personal character/ethos and feelings because recognizing humor is simply independent of emotions and not indicative of ego. Humor can at most suggest a cognitive shift, but its production and appreciation do not necessarily and sufficiently mean that emotions are felt and that one’s character (ego) is ‘revealed’. Making unfalsifiable inferences about the emotional mechanism and character mechanism of humor can be overextending the construct of humor in an erroneous manner, if emotion and character components are plainly not intrinsic in it in the first place. The usefulness of the findings in this study is limited to how the intangible concept of humor is defined. For this study, humor is specified as the embodied cognition of an appropriate incongruity, triggered by the play in semiotics by individuals in society; rhetoric is specified as the use of logos, pathos, ethos to communicate; laughter is specified as an embodied, social communication, in which the behavioral response communicates cognition, emotion, and mockery. Prudent awareness of the assumptions and conceptual specifications are required. Not conflating the construct of humor with the behavior of laughter is essential.

Fourth, the inter-rater reliability in this study was conducted on 26.7% of the coding for Technique, Target, and Appeal, and for the remaining 73.3% of the laughter moments, inter- or intra-rater reliability was not established. To mitigate this (as described in the last paragraph of Chapter 4), the analytical process included discussions with non-Toastmasters on how Technique, Target, and Appeal trigger
laughter in the dataset videos. Having had informal discussions on laughter, rhetoric, and humor with a mix of at least a hundred Toastmasters and non-Toastmasters was crucial in showing me the possibilities and themes of what can be signified from the sign of laughter. Nevertheless, the categorization of laughter in this study is still mostly based on my interpretations rather than a robustly validated framework; future research may investigate other approaches to categorization or use statistical techniques that do not rely on categorization.

Fifth, the sample size of 57 speeches (T = 401 min and 28 secs) is considered small for a quantitative study and analysis. As such, future research can incorporate winning Toastmasters’ speeches at the 2018, 2019, and 2020 WCPS® into the dataset analyzed. With a larger quantitative sample size, better statistical results and more meaningful interpretations can emerge. To elaborate, Table 5.16 (on pages 179-182) that summarizes the 41 Techniques used can be submitted to data reduction methods similar to Buijzen and Valkenburg’s (2004) study (on page 73) to investigate whether a seven-factorial taxonomy of (i) Slapstick, (ii) Clownish Humor, (iii) Misunderstanding, (iv) Surprise, (v) Irony, (vi) Parody, and (vii) Satire still holds.

7.3 Significance of the Study

The significance of the study resides in it addressing three strands of gap in the literature for methodological, theoretical, and practical contributions. In Chapter 2, empirical studies and the theoretical constructs of rhetoric and humor were reviewed for three literature gaps to be identified.
First, there is an established gap between the constructs of humor and rhetoric that this study sought to reduce. As highlighted in section 2.4, both Weaver (2011, p. 432) and Weaver (2015, p. 344) conclude that there are limited studies that employ a rhetorical analysis of humor as its methodology and encourage academics to unpack how humor is rhetorical. The Humor-Rhetoric-7 (with a socio-psychological underpinning) as encapsulated by Figure 3.5 in Chapter 3 is the main methodological contribution of the thesis. Seven interrogative WH-questions, such as ‘When is humor rhetorical?’ and ‘Why is humor rhetorical?’, were first asked to construct knowledge of the link between humor and rhetoric. Embodied Cognition, Location, Producer-Consumer Relation, Semiotic Mode, Technique, Target, and Appeal were then identified as the main mechanisms that influence how humor is rhetorical. Subsequently, social semiotics and psychodynamics were adopted as viable analytical approaches for a socio-psychological underpinning to examine humor in rhetoric. The Humor-Rhetoric-7 (guided by a socio-psychological underpinning) was thereafter applied to a toast speech example before the interrogative methodology was administered to a corpus of 57 WCPS® speeches in the main study. The methodological approach that I put forth is effective to systematically analyze how a rhetorical monologue is humorous to bring forth contextual findings.

Second, there is a conflicting gap among explanations of laughter due to humor that this study bridged via the mediating link of the three rhetorical appeals. As elaborated in section 2.4, most researchers explain laughter due to humor with only one or two factors. For example, to account for why people ‘laugh’ out of ‘humor’, Palmer (1987) explains it as primarily due to logic that is false, Chafe (2007)
explains it as primarily due to the feeling of non-seriousness, while McGraw & Warren (2014) explains it as primarily due to violations that are benign. The main theoretical contribution of the study is the synthesis in explaining laughter due to humor as arising from the three factors of logic, emotion, and character. I explained that laughter due to humor arises when (i) a cognitive-shift brings (ii) affective-pleasure to (iii) enlarge a laughers ego. The ego-enlargement conjecture, which consists of the psychodynamic, realistic and direct pathways, is my own formulation that to some extent represents new theoretical knowledge. How this study attempted to bridge the conflicting gap was via aligning the classics and by drawing a clear distinction between ‘What generates laughter (due to humor)?’ and ‘Why do people laugh (due to humor)?’ which can be conflated in scholarship. I specified that separating the inquiries of the (content) ‘what’ versus the (covert) ‘why’ is fundamentally critical.

Third, there is an unexplored gap in the academic inquiry into the winning Toastmasters' speeches that this study filled. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study that investigates humor in rhetoric at the World Championship of Public Speaking® via the variable of audience laughter. What is most practically useful (for rhetorical monologue speakers) is the thematic finding that laughter moments are strikingly generated by the application of ‘wit in mockery’. Wit in mockery refers to using words, semiotics, and ideas in a quick, intelligent, and inventive manner to ridicule, embarrass, taunt, or deride people and the social order. Apart from considering the strategic Techniques of ‘Conceptual Surprise’, ‘Exaggeration’, ‘Ironic’, ‘Satire’, ‘Slapstick’, et cetera, ‘wit in mockery’ as a broad applicative approach was observed to be robustly effective to commonly generate laughter.
moments. Although the broad means of ‘play with meanings’ commonly generated laughter as well, this thematic framework suggests instead that laughter is playful, or fun-natured, in its core. Both thematic observations, being fundamentally unfalsifiable, can hold true at the same time but prioritizing the framework of ‘wit in mockery’ may be more realistic and practical. Billig (2005) explains that ever since Plato (427-347 B.C.E) described laughter more than 2300 years ago as malicious in the ‘Philebus’ when people ridiculed the weak, more scholars throughout history regard laughter as primarily cruel-natured in its core before positive by-products (such as feelings of fun, superiority, relief, affiliation, trust) can be accompanied.

7.4 Future Directions of Research

To grow the methodological, theoretical, and practical contributions to the field of humor studies, future directions of research can be pursued. The methodological approach put forth to systematically analyze how a rhetorical monologue is humorous can be applied to other public speaking contexts. This includes political rallies, TED talks, valedictorian speeches, or even in the monologue of public eulogies. For instance, Bill Clinton’s eulogy (t = 11 min 03 sec) to Muhammad Ali\(^1\) on 10\(^{th}\) June 2016 had 11 laughter instances of which 6 were humor-rhetoric moments of \(\geq 2000\text{ms}\). Other eulogies laden with jokes and laughter to sincerely pay tribute to public figures include Brooke Shields to Michael Jackson\(^2\) and George W. Bush to George H. W. Bush\(^3\), which can be comprehensively examined with the WH-questions to bring forth contextual findings in how humor is used (as rhetoric) to pay tribute to a person’s death. Additionally, future directions of research, in

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1 See bit.ly/ntuphd_Ali, if interested.
terms of methodology, can use onset detection techniques (such as through the software package of Audacity and PRAAT) to improve the precision of identifying the onset of laughter in every video.

Indubitably, the ego-enlargement conjecture requires further research to hold theoretical weight. Experimental laboratory studies investigating the conjecture is one way to grow the academic contribution of this study. For instance, undergraduate participants can be invited to watch videos\(^1\) of humor in rhetoric and answer guiding questions regarding their laughter in and outside the experimental setting, based on their unique perspective with the assurance of anonymity. Participants’ documentation of their idiosyncratic thoughts, feelings and beliefs to explain each time that they laughed from the stimulus provided would be valuable data. Procedurally, general questions about laughter due to humor can be asked to lead-in, before questions get progressively specific (such as ‘Would you say that your laughter reflects your character?’) and deeper (such as ‘Would you say that you specifically laughing, or not laughing, is related to virtues/ previous experiences/ self-interest?’). Importantly, experimental laboratory studies can be constructed in an explorative manner and in a falsifiable manner (e.g. doing a nonparametric contrast analysis of ‘ego-shrink’ versus ‘ego-enlarge’ based on behavioral and self-report indicators). According to Kalat (2016), ‘Libido’ (i.e. love instincts), ‘Eros’

\(^1\) Hypothetically, the laughter-inducing videos can include the opening monologues in ‘The Ellen DeGeneres Show’ or ‘I Love You, America with Sarah Silverman’, popular sitcoms of ‘The Big Bang Theory’ or ‘Young Sheldon’, sketch comedy in the ‘Tracey Ullman Show’ or ‘Saturday Night Live’, et cetera.

In terms of experimental procedure, the pre-selected laughter-inducing stimulus can be provided on a tablet device so that participants can choose what they prefer to engage in for laughter, as well as alternate their eyes between the tablet and the computer device which their responses are typed into. Additionally, the laughter-inducing videos can be curated to be exactly 5 minutes each to ensure standardization of the time-factor.

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(i.e. life instincts) and ‘Thanatos’ (i.e. death instincts) are often described as the energy or the undercurrent moving the idiosyncratic iceberg, as depicted in Figure 7.1. A psychodynamic analysis can be much more nuanced, especially if a researcher considers the historical waves that led to the present oceanic position that the egoistic-iceberg is at to be plausibly shrinking or enlarging in laughter.

Figure 7.1: A More Nuanced Psychodynamics Framework, whereby more Technical Terms are Added to study Actions by the Executive Mediating Ego

The main practical contribution of this study is the thematic finding that highlights laughter due to humor in rhetoric as commonly generated by ‘wit in mockery’. However, this study examined laughter, humor, and rhetoric only in the language paradigm of English. Would the thematic finding still hold true in a different language paradigm? Nisbett, Peng, Choi, and Norenzayan (2001) emphasizes that
Western Languages (such as English) are based on analytic cognition, unlike East Asian languages (such as Mandarin Chinese, Korean, Japanese) which are based on holistic reasoning. Because the two language types are “embedded in different metaphysical systems and tacit epistemologies”, basic cognitive processes are different such as East Asians “making relatively little use of categories and formal logic” (p. 291). Thence, what commonly generates laughter \textit{in rhetoric} might be acutely influenced by the language in which the rhetoric is produced. Rhetorical humor is not only orated in the language of English; it is practically important that future directions of research study the inter-relations of humor, rhetoric, and laughter in other spoken languages (such as Arabic-script languages, East Asian languages, unwritten languages). Researching on how humor is rhetorical in other linguistic, sociocultural settings would provide practical contributions to the native speakers of those languages so that they can apply humor pertinently in their lingual rhetoric.

7.5 Closing Comments

The path for further \textit{humor in rhetoric} studies consists of options, in which some were outlined in section 7.4. The process of doing a doctorate thesis to analyze \textit{laughter} due to humor in rhetoric made me aware of the volume of research by past and present scholars. The accrued literature is extensive, but more studies are still imperative. There are differing ways to explain laughter, humor, rhetoric but none holds supreme because multifarious viewpoints can co-exist firmly in its place, if they are valid.

The aim of this thesis, as stated in section 1.1, is to uncover how humor is used as rhetoric in public speaking. To achieve this aim, I investigated the overarching
research question: How is humor used as rhetoric in 57 winning Toastmasters' speeches? After scrutinizing 57 WCPS® speeches (T = 401 min 28 secs), across 6 years from 2012 to 2017, which had 873 laughter instances and 262 laughter moments, the aim of the research is met when I explained in detail how humor is rhetorical via examining seven influencing causes of audience laughter.

Epilogue

The prologue described a "Indians are Cheap” Russell Peters’ standup segment which was intensely laughter-inducing (with 34 audience laughter instances in less than 4 minutes), but I could not authentically laugh and felt empty after the show. Ten years ago, in 2008, the teenaged me was mystified by laughter and humor. Today, in December 2018, I am more cognizant of the mechanisms behind audience laughter. This explorative study is personally important because I realized that one foundational cause for emptiness felt in laughter resides in dis-embodied actions, such as fake laughing to socially fit in. When one is not pretending a smile or forcing a laugh, embodied laughter that is genuinely spontaneous gives pleasure.

In retrospect, if the 2008 “Red, White, and Brown” Stand-up Comedy Show by Russell Peters is soberly reviewed for its broad extent to successively elicit audience laughter, the historical context in which the humor in rhetoric occurred must be considered. Public perceptions about the funniness of in vogue taboo issues (such as racial sensitivity towards stereotypical beliefs) differ year by year. What was culturally hilarious in a standup comedy of 1978 could be too juvenile to be perceived as uproariously funny for an audience in 2018 when societal context changes and the margin for acceptable societal behavior is dissimilar. Therefore,
what was evidently funny to people in 2008 would not necessarily be transgressive or appealing enough to provoke laughter to people at present looking back in time. Additionally, my idiosyncratic maturity in life experiences back then would also regulate my capacity to appreciate some of his jokes as funny. For instance, the sexual insolence blatant in his jokes (please see bit.ly/ntuphd_RP_part2 for the details and then bit.ly/ntuphd_RP_part1 if interested) would not readily elicit laughter for a virgin. Furthermore, I was generally uptight as a person in 2008 and took his jokes literally and seriously such that I was not able to easily shift into a carefree frame of mind to perceive that jokes, by definition, are rightly not meant to be taken seriously or believed. Trajectory in personal history and the sociocultural backdrop in-situ are valid factors to consider when broadly reviewing the 2008 rhetorical humor of Mr. Peters on hindsight.

In present sight, today, being cognizant that ‘wit in mocking individuals and ideas’ is a recurring thematic observation in big laughter moments allows me to sensibly appreciate the magic of how humor in rhetoric is created at the highest level by top practitioners1. Perceiving laughter to be commonly generated by social ridicule is certainly true in reality and for me. I laugh most heartedly not by affiliative teasing or light jabs in rhetoric but by antipathetic punches. When indulging in satire news (such as ‘Last Week Tonight with John Oliver’ or ‘The Daily Show with Trevor Noah’), reflexively boisterous laughter happens most for me when jokes are

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1 Good examples include John Olivier mocking Xi Jinping for his resemblance to Winne the Pooh to deftly suggest insecurity in the strength of a bear (see bit.ly/ntuphd_JO) and Trevor Noah regularly mocking Ted Cruz (e.g. bit.ly/ntuphd_TN1) to be a butt for laughter. It is intelligent of Trevor Noah to select Senator Ted Cruz as a punching bag for jokes, rather than to ridicule a more broadly-respected Senator (e.g. John McCain, Jeff Flake, Susan Collins) for a largely American audience to probabilistically not be too offended (see bit.ly/ntuphd_TN2 and bit.ly/ntuphd_TN3 for examples).
aggressively transgressive and when I am not personally inhibited by a moralistic ‘should’ (such as ‘Laughing loudly in front of others is not something that you should do’). I peculiarly laugh more loudly when I am alone at home than at a social setting for fear that people will judge me for being impulsive with self-orientated pleasure. I need to feel safe to open up and be vulnerable in laughter and it occurs readily when nobody (such as my stern parents) is around me to subconsciously judge. For some, the pleasures from laughter do not arise most at a social setting, but in solitude.
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LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A:
Analyzing 262 Humor-Rhetoric Moments in terms of its Semiotic Trigger, Technique and Target
➢ Please see the Excel Spreadsheet in bit.ly/ntuphd_Appendix

Appendix B:
Descriptive Details of the 57 WCPS® Speeches (with URL Links)
➢ Please see the Excel Spreadsheet in bit.ly/ntuphd_Appendix

Appendix C:
Transcript of the Toast Speech Example by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong
➢ Please see bit.ly/ntuphd_AppendixC
   (or after page 333 in bit.ly/ntuphd-pdf)

Appendix D:
Judging Criteria used by Toastmasters International at the WCPS®
➢ Please see the PDF File in bit.ly/ntuphd_AppendixD

Supplementary Material 1: Pictures of the Stage Settings and Audience
➢ Please see bit.ly/ntuphd_SM1
   (or after page 333 in bit.ly/ntuphd-pdf)

Supplementary Material 2: Transcripts of the 57 WCPS® Speeches
➢ Please see bit.ly/ntuphd_SM2
   (or after page 333 in bit.ly/ntuphd-pdf)