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Humor and Mental Effort in Learning
(Under the Direction of LLOYD P. RIEBER)

This study investigated the effects of humor on learning, specifically focusing on the variables of mental effort, perceived self-efficacy, perceived demand characteristics, achievement, and attitude towards instructional content. This research is based on the work of Gavriel Salomon (1984) and is a modified replication of his research. Salomon's theory of symbolic coding is presented and applied to the area of humor and learning. It was hypothesized that the amount of invested mental effort (AIME) varies as a function of initial perceptions of humorous instruction, even when the material warrants otherwise. For example, if a difficult lesson is perceived as easy, the AIME may decrease.

Undergraduate college students ($n = 100$) were tested for their perceptions of self-efficacy with learning from humor and nonhumor, as well as for how demanding they perceived humorous and nonhumorous modes of presentation to be. One week later, approximately half of the participants viewed a humorous instructional video and the other half viewed a nonhumorous instructional video. The two videos were identical except for the embedded humorous content. Measures of AIME, achievement, and attitude/interest were taken. Participants rated humorous presentations as less believable than nonhumorous presentations and rated themselves as more efficacious with learning from humorous instructional videos than with learning from nonhumorous instructional videos. Participants responded with higher levels of interest and a more positive attitude towards the content of the humorous presentation. Humor did not appear to affect learning, and not one of the expected correlations was found between AIME, perceptions of self-efficacy, and learning. The study also found that humor is generally perceived as an easier, better way to learn, while also requiring more effort in order to comprehend content. One important outcomes was that humor seems to have a function and

dysfunction with regard to learning. The discussion explores reasons why the study may not have yielded the expected outcomes and offers suggestions for further research.

INDEX WORDS: Humor, Learning, Self-efficacy, Salomon, Symbolic coding,
Mental effort, Perceived demand characteristics, Attitude