

A PILOT CORPUS STUDY OF FAT HUMOR IN *MIKE AND MOLLY*

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INTRODUCTION

- Fat jokes have been around since ancient times.
 - Since ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs (Garrison, 2011)
 - And *Philogelos*, the ancient Greek joke book (Quinn, 2001)
- However, as society has gotten fatter, the purpose of fat humor has evolved.
- Previously considered a type of aggressive humor.
- Fat humor is now also a way to empower overweight people thanks body positive movements, and a sitcom featuring two overweight leads, *Mike and Molly* (West, 2017).

RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESIS

- Research Question:
 - In season one of *Mike and Molly*, is the fat humor usage positive or negative?
- Hypothesis:
 - Using fat humor from the 24 episodes that comprise season one of *Mike and Molly*, I hypothesize that fat humor will largely be seen as positive and empowering, not insulting. In fact, these jokes are meant to shed light upon fat stereotypes and the realities of living as an overweight person in a largely fat-phobic society.

FAT HUMOR EXAMPLES

MIKE: Hi Molly

MOLLY: I didn't see you there.

MIKE: Yeah, I lost another pound. I'm becoming a rail.

WAITRESS: Listen, why don't I just bring you a whole order of French fries and you just eat 12 of them?

MIKE: If I could eat just 12, this shirt wouldn't look like it was made in an awning store.

MOLLY: I tried that portion-control diet once.

MIKE: Yeah, how'd it go?

MOLLY: Gained 14 pounds three freaking gummy bears at a time.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND METHOD

- Method

- LIWC, Michael Cohn, Matthias Mehl, James Pennebaker, 2004
- Discourse Transcription, John W. Du Bois, 1991
- Mixed Method, R. Burke Johnson, Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie, 2004

- Fat Image

- Humor's power, Bernard Beck, 2009
- Stereotypes and media, Cynthia Nichols, Bobbi Kay Lewis, and MK Shreves, 2015

MY METHOD

- Watching each episode of season one of *Mike and Molly*, I created a transcript.
- I used LIWC to get quantitative data regarding positive and negative sentiment markers used in the fat humor.
- Then, I conducted qualitative analysis to present my own data regarding the usage of positive and negative fat humor.

RESULTS – QUANTITATIVE

- Positive Emotions

- The total words that are positive
 - *Mike and Molly*: 3.3%
 - LIWC: 3.6%

- Negative Emotions

- The total words that are negative
 - *Mike and Molly*: 2.2%
 - LIWC: 1.8%

- Emotional Tone

- The combination of both positive and negative
 - *Mike and Molly*: 57.3%
 - LIWC: 54.22

RESULTS - QUALITATIVE

- There are a total of 128 fat jokes in season one of *Mike and Molly*.
- Here are my results:
 - Positive
 - 83.6%
 - Negative
 - 16.4%

EXAMPLE 1

EP. 2 – “FIRST DATE”

MIKE: I’m open to a little color, but nothing too crazy. I don’t want my date to open up the door and scream, ‘Hey, Kool-Aid’.

ANDRE: I got you. We’ll stay away from primary colors.

MIKE: Good, and no horizontal stripes.

ANDRE: Horizontal stripes? Look, you are not my first big boy rodeo.

EXAMPLE 2

EP. 2 – “FIRST DATE”

JOYCE: What’s going on up here? I’m running out of small talk, and this guy’s a piece of wood.

VICTORIA: We just need another minute. Make him a snack.

JOYCE: Oh great. I’ll grab a bucket of peanuts.

SUMMARY

- My hypothesis of fat humor in *Mike and Molly* being overall positive has been tentatively confirmed through both methods.
- However, this study only looked at the first season of *Mike and Molly*, and there are a total of six seasons.
- Furthermore, the concept of fat jokes should be broken down more to include differences between gender.



Thank you!

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