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# Investigating Inside Jokes and Their Implications for Individual and Interpersonal Functioning

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INVESTIGATING INSIDE JOKES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND  
INTERPERSONAL FUNCTIONING

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirement for the Degree

Doctor of Psychology

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
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The current study investigated the individual and interpersonal functions of inside jokes. The sample consisted of 60 college students from ages 18 to 30 years. Participants engaged in a series of individual and group online chats with two humorous partners and one neutral partner. The sample was randomly assigned to an inside joke condition with 30 participants experiencing an inside joke and 30 participants experiencing no inside joke. Following the humor manipulation, participants' ratings of liking for, social desirability of, and subjective similarity with each partner were measured. Additionally, participants' endorsement of the affiliative, aggressive, self-enhancing, and self-defeating humor styles as well as pre and post-test levels of need fulfillment and feelings of existential isolation were assessed. Results indicated inside jokers were significantly more liked, socially desirable, and similar to participants. Furthermore, experiencing an inside joke significantly reduced feelings of existential isolation. Experiencing an inside joke with a stranger did not significantly increase need fulfillment. No moderating effect of the four humor styles or participant gender on the relationship between inside joke condition and liking of the inside joker was demonstrated. Based on the current findings and previous humor literature, it was concluded that inside jokes have a powerful interpersonal effect such that they function as a purposeful and humorous I-sharing moment, which serves to decrease feelings of existential isolation and increase liking and social desirability of others.