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**Humour in Multicultural South African Texts:  
Finding Common Ground**

**Lynn Wood  
Lecturer**

**Corporate Communication and Marketing  
Walter Sisulu University  
South Africa**

**Alicia Van Der Spuy  
Head of Department**

**Corporate Communication and Marketing  
Walter Sisulu University  
South Africa**

**Lakshmi Jayakrishnan  
Senior Lecturer**

**Corporate Communication and Marketing  
Walter Sisulu University  
South Africa**

**Vasti Pienaar  
Lecturer**

**Corporate Communication and Marketing  
Walter Sisulu University  
South Africa**

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Athens Institute for Education and Research  
8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10671 Athens, Greece  
Tel: + 30 210 3634210 Fax: + 30 210 3634209 Email: info@atiner.gr URL:  
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**Humour in Multicultural South African Texts:  
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**Lynn Wood  
Alicia Van Der Spuy  
Lakshmi Jayakrishnan  
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**Abstract**

South Africa is a country of extreme beauty and rich cultural diversity. South Africans, or the Rainbow Nation, as we are affectionately referred to, have the ability to moan together, criticise our politicians together, feel each other's pain together, cry together, but we do not seem to share the ability to laugh together. Humour and the definitions of it vary across cultural frontiers. We recognise the fact that different things are funny to different people. Humour can also be used as a tool in the education process to ease tensions and create a safe environment to discuss issues of cultural differences and inequality. In order to understand humour, there needs to be an understanding of the contexts found in a variety of texts. For the purpose of this paper, the Communication 1 lecturers of Walter Sisulu University will undertake a comparative study of written texts from three sister South African magazines, purportedly aimed at different cultural groups in our country, over a four week period, to investigate the different ways that humour has been used in these texts. Although this study will deal primarily with the comparison of humorous texts, the similarities and differences in the way that this humour is portrayed will be examined, thereby enhancing our understanding for use in the lecture room. This will be a multicultural study seeking to investigate whether it is possible to find humour that can cross cultural barriers by not being offensive, overtly sexual in nature, and politically incorrect, and thus allowing us to smile at situations that we would not normally consider. Finally, this paper will examine whether it is possible to view humour through various texts as a means of cultural reconciliation.

**Keywords:** Humour, comparative texts, multiculturalism, reconciliation, South Africa

*Analysing humour is like dissecting a frog. Few people  
are interested and the frog dies of it.*  
E. B. White

## **Introduction**

South Africa is a country of extreme beauty and rich cultural diversity. South Africans, or the Rainbow Nation, as we are affectionately referred to, have the ability to moan together, criticise our politicians together, feel each other's pain together, cry together, but we do not seem to share the ability to laugh together (SA History, 2017).

Humour is an important element of our everyday lives, as it is characteristic of all human beings, regardless of their culture, race or religious beliefs (Buja, 2013). The study of humour has its origins in antiquity, with both Aristotle and Plato laying the foundation for this research. Since then, philosophers and scholars have tried to both understand and explain what it is that makes us laugh (Buja, 2013). This has led to researchers in many different fields - such as sociology, psychology, and linguistics - taking an interest in the study of humour.

The lifting of apartheid in 1994 (SA History, 2017) resulted in South Africa emerging as a democratic multicultural nation (Gören, 2013), composed of various races and communities from all walks of life; a melting-pot of people, religious beliefs, political ideals, hopes and aspirations.

South African humour took on a new identity with apartheid gone (Radloff, 2013). This created the opportunity for the emergence of a multitude of characters with a local flavour, such as *Madam and Eve*, a cartoon originally created by Stephen Francis, H. Dugmore and Rico, first published in 1992. This cartoon relates the various adventures of a so-called "madam", a name normally associated in South Africa with a white woman employer of a cleaning lady, who usually would be of a different race. "Madam" is thus the boss and "Eve" is the maid. *Madam and Eve* is truly representative of the new South African humour that emerged after the fall of apartheid (Britten, 1998), as is the humour of Leon Schuster and Trevor Noah.

Humour and the definitions of it vary across cultural frontiers. South Africa's eleven official languages represent eleven cultures, yet the nation's cultural diversity is not restricted to these. The perception is that if you are of a certain race, you would speak a particular language. For instance, if you are "white"<sup>1</sup> in South Africa, you may speak either English or Afrikaans. You may also be a mixture of different cultures. If you are "black," you are Zulu, Sotho, Tswana, Venda, Pedi or Xhosa. If you are "coloured," you are probably Afrikaans or English speaking with the possibility of white, black, San or Khoi people in your ancestry. If you are Indian, your ancestors would have originated from India and you would speak English most of the time, whilst also having the ability to speak an Indian language too. These perceptions may

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<sup>1</sup>These classifications are problematic; thus the use of inverted commas.

not be true, but many South Africans are bilingual, speaking either English and/or Afrikaans or an indigenous language<sup>2</sup>.

Humour is commonly defined as the quality of being funny, and someone is referred to as having a sense of humour, or the ability to appreciate or express that which is humorous<sup>3</sup>. South Africans have a good sense of humour (Sheldon, 2016). Leon Schuster, an actor and acclaimed film producer, both internationally and at home, has developed the art of being able to target average South Africans of all creeds and colours and make them laugh at themselves by using their unique prejudices and fears. He thereby creates a truly South African humour. Trevor Noah, another highly successful South African comedian, has gone on to further his career internationally after gaining huge popularity in South Africa for his unabashed local humour. His success may be due to his ability to transcend cultures because of his own multicultural background.

Nationally, most people would make jokes about Afrikaans people, using a character called Van Der Merwe – Koos (Jan). In fact, some might say that one could hardly be considered South African if one had not heard a Van der Merwe joke in one's lifetime (Swart, 2009). Van der Merwe jokes are often combined with other characters, such as a priest, a politician, a German, a woman or a blonde, and always end with him opting for a ridiculous course of action at the end. Van der Merwe is a stereotypical Afrikaans person and serves to ridicule Afrikaans people (Swart, 2009). It may, thus, be seen as offensive, especially when told by non-Afrikaans speaking persons. Nandos, a fast food chain outlet, is also renowned for its ability to tap into the current state of affairs and produce topical, comedic advertisements (Mboti, 2013). There are, of course, also, the blonde jokes which have been in circulation for many years.

We recognise the fact that different things are funny to different people. Humour, whilst representing an important part of South African life and, in some cases, social survival, does not necessarily reflect this diversity in the texts selected for this research. In order to understand humour, there needs to be an understanding of the contexts found in a variety of texts. For the purpose of this paper, the Communication 1 lecturers of Walter Sisulu University undertook a comparative study of written texts from three South African sister magazines, purportedly aimed at different cultural groups in our country, over a four week period, to investigate the different ways that humour had been used in these texts. Although this study deals primarily with the comparison of humorous texts, the similarities and differences in the way that this humour has been portrayed will be examined, thereby enhancing our understanding for use in the lecture room with our students.

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<sup>2</sup>South Africa's Languages. 2016. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2JwWb0p>. [Accessed: 27 April 2017]

<sup>3</sup>Farlex. 2017. The Free Dictionary by Farlex. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2nR3BCv>. [Accessed: 19 March 2017]

## Literature Review

Over the years, much has been written and numerous theories proposed as to why and what makes people laugh. According to Wild, Rodden, Grodd, and Ruch (2003), Charles Darwin (1872) in his book *The Expression of the Emotions of Man and Animals* proposed that laughter was a social expression that had evolved from the need to articulate happiness. This was considered an advantage as it provided social cohesion needed for survival. Polimeni and Reiss (2006) state that there is a difference between humour and laughter. Humour relates to human behaviour on a psychological level, whereas laughter is a physical response. Today, our understanding of humour is based on a number of different theories: namely the Superiority Theory, the Incongruity Theory, the Relief Theory and the Relaxation Theory (Morreall, 2009), amongst others. Berger (2016), in his paper "Three Holy Men Get Haircuts: The Semiotic Analysis of a Joke", discusses these different approaches to humour. He refers to four theories dealing with why people find texts humorous. In the first of these theories Berger argues that "humour is based on a sense of superiority" (2016). He makes reference to Aristotle who said that humour was based on an imitation of men worse than average; worse however, not in regards to any sort of fault, but only to one particular kind, the Ridiculous, which is a species of the Ugly. The Ridiculous may be defined as a mistake or a deformity not of pain or harm to others.

The joker, or the amused party, feels victorious over the subject of amusement, thereby building their confidence and self-esteem.

The second theory is based on "incongruity where laughter is created when there is a difference between what we expect and what we get" (Berger, 2016). Buizen and Valkenburg (2004) state that this theory "assumes that the cognitive capacity to note and understand incongruous events is necessary to experience laughter". According to Roome (1998), "the notion of incongruity in the establishment of certain relationships and situations can create laughter" but is directly related to class position or gender. Absurdity, nonsense and surprise are essential components of this theory.

The psychoanalytic or third theory suggests that "humour is primarily a form of masked aggression" (Berger, 2016). Jokes, or humour based on this perspective, allow participants to be involved "in the aggression without any sense of guilt" (Berger, 2016).

The fourth and final theory "ties humour to communication paradoxes and suggests that humour results from the use of paradox, play and the resolution of logical problems" (Berger, 2016). Fry (Berger, 1998) affirms that "[i]nescapably the punch line combines communication and meta-communication"; meta-communication refers to a secondary communication where denotative meaning can be interpreted.

Paul Jewell (2005) states that "humour clearly involves a number of states and processes". In his paper "Humour in cognitive and social development: Creative artists and class clowns" (2005, p. 200), he examines the demands that humour makes on both one's cognitive and creative abilities. He further states

that the telling of a joke requires "... a scene to be established, a story to be told, a set of expectations to be developed in the minds of the audience. Then, at precisely the right moment, the expectations are overturned" (Jewell, 2005).

He argues that being able to do this requires a high level of cognitive development: "the telling of a joke requires one to see the world as someone else would see it and to be sensitive towards the feelings and beliefs of others". Jokes are usually about something and Jewell (2005) breaks them down into the following categories "dirty jokes, lawyer jokes, racial jokes, toilet jokes".

The categories of jokes that we analyse will show similar characteristics. Many jokes make reference to stereotypical, universal characters, depending on the country one happens to reside in: whether they are the Englishman, the Irishman or the Scotsman, or, in a South African context, one would refer to an Englishman, an Irishman and Van der Merwe, an icon of Afrikaans humour. "The success of a joke very often depends on ... the insult delivered in the punch line, or, rather, which particular group of people are insulted" (Jewell, 2005). Very often the form of a joke can be left unaltered with only the punch line being changed to suit a particular context.

Jewell acknowledges that "the simplest verbal joke is the pun", (2005, p. 203) relying on two opposing frames of reference. The punch line is unexpected and requires a mind shift. Koestler (1964) refers to this mind shift as "bisociation" and sees it as an essential process for creativity. Jewell (2005, p. 204) says that "there is much more to humour than jokes and punch lines".

Mark Rainbird (2004), in his paper "Humour, Multiculturalism and Political Correctness" states, "There is undoubtedly a long historical association between humour, comedy and politics" (2004, p. 4). He relates how there is a clear relationship between politically incorrect humour and national identity. The aim of his paper was to bring new insight into the neglected area of politicisation of humour by looking at the expression of Australian identity through Kevin "Bloody" Wilson's humour. Humour, according to Rainbird (2004, p. 2) is able to bring to light taboo subjects in a way that might question or assert commonly held beliefs. This makes humour "a particularly potent vehicle for expressing controversial views" (2004, p. 2). Dorothy Roome (1998) proposed that "the phenomenon of humour acts as a catalyst, breaking down cultural barriers among people of different cultures and languages and in the process dilutes anger and thereby effects cultural reconciliation". Thus, humour can be used as an agent to effect social change within a multicultural society like South Africa.

Whilst theories give some indication of why we laugh, Berger (2016) has gone on to further develop a list of 45 techniques of humour that he feels are present in all humorous texts. "They tell us what makes us laugh which is different from why we laugh" (2016, p. 491). These techniques concentrate on the mechanics of the joke, in other words what is going on in the joke that specifically makes us laugh. Berger calls these techniques "the DNA of humour" (2016, p. 491). It is possible to find more than one of these techniques being used in a joke at a time.

For the purpose of our paper, we will use Berger's analysis of humour. We will use his classification system to compare the written jokes of three sister

magazines over a four week period. We will make reference to the world as seen by others and how this affects the telling of jokes. As Jewell notes (2005, p. 201) "the author of a common joke is unknown, it's modifications over time uncontrolled".

## Methodology

For this study, we made use of content analysis methodology, generally defined as a systematic reading of texts, images or symbolic matter (Krippendorff, 2013) or, as Holsti (Stemler, 2011) has put it, "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages". This method is particularly useful in analysing large quantities of texts and for examining trends and patterns in these texts (Stemler, 2011). This makes content analysis a practical and convenient tool for analysing the identified data for this specific study.

For our analysis, we identified three similar South African magazines that are published weekly. These magazines are all distributed by Media24, which is the print division of Naspers, who market themselves as "a global internet and entertainment group and one of the largest technology investors in the world".<sup>4</sup> The *Huisgenoot* ("Home Companion")<sup>5</sup> the *You Magazine*<sup>6</sup> (You, s.a.) and *Drum*<sup>7</sup> are considered to be family magazines and appear on a weekly basis. Of these magazines, *Drum* had the highest readership with 3,196,000 estimated at the end of 2015 (SAARF, 2015). *You* had an estimated readership of 2,084,000 and *Huisgenoot* 1,908,000. The circulation, however, shows that *Huisgenoot* is the biggest weekly magazine with a circulation of 185,002 per week (Marklives, 2018) with *You*'s circulation standing at 95,359 per week. *Drum*'s circulation is approximated at 37,200 weekly.

*Huisgenoot* was founded in 1916 (Viljoen, 2006), in response to the aftermath of the South African War, as a magazine to entertain, educate and uplift Afrikaans speaking people, as well as to drive the Nationalist agenda. However, today the magazine's agenda is driven by profit (Viljoen, 2006) and contains popular culture articles, such as celebrity news, fashion and gossip.

*You* originated in 1987 as a response to the need for a weekly family magazine and is advertised as "South Africa's best-selling English language magazine".<sup>8</sup> The focus is on the whole family, with content similar to, or even duplicating, that of *Huisgenoot*.

*Drum* has been published since 1951 (Clowes, 2005), but was originally named *The African Drum*. It was funded and owned by white men, but the contents were produced by black journalists and photographers. It is advertised

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<sup>4</sup> NASPERS. 2017. Retrieved from [www.naspers.com](http://www.naspers.com).

<sup>5</sup> Retrieved from [www.huisgenoot.com](http://www.huisgenoot.com).

<sup>6</sup> Retrieved from [www.you.co.za](http://www.you.co.za).

<sup>7</sup> Retrieved from [www.drum.co.za](http://www.drum.co.za).

<sup>8</sup> Retrieved from [www.mysubs.co.za/magazine/you](http://www.mysubs.co.za/magazine/you).



as a "trendsetting weekly" which is "aligned" with its readers,<sup>9</sup> even though it ironically publishes in English.

Each of these magazines was originally aimed at a very specific cultural group or groupings within the South African context. The assumption has been that *Huisgenoot* is aimed at "white" Afrikaans speakers; *You* is aimed at "white" English speakers, and *Drum* at any person that can be classified as "black". In the case of the *Huisgenoot*, the majority of readers are still "white" and Afrikaans, but the readership for *You* is mostly "black" (Marklives, 2015).

These magazines represent the average South African across cultural boundaries to a large extent. Each magazine features a weekly humour section with a number of jokes. The question was whether these jokes would reflect the different readerships of the different magazines, or whether they would represent a safe middle ground, where, as in corporate communication, the focus is on non-threatening affiliations and self-defeating humour (Sosik, 2012). We also asked ourselves whether the humour present in these magazines would reflect what we heard and read on a daily basis. This humour may be seen as offensive by different cultures, especially as many of these jokes have a political undertone. In fact, as Rainbird (2004) notes, there is a clear relationship between politically incorrect humour and national identity.

We have limited the study to one month's issues of *Huisgenoot*, *You* and *Drum* from November/December 2016. Each issue represents one week. The expectation was that the jokes pages would also reflect the readership of the magazines and thus the cultural diversity of the country.

As previously stated, we used Berger's (2016) "Anatomy of Humor" to divide the jokes into manageable units. Thus, we have implemented his categories, namely Language, Logic, Identity and Action, as well as his 45 techniques, to categorise the jokes. Coding and categorising was, therefore, predetermined and would help to establish trends and patterns in the texts (Stemler, 2011).

The aim of this study was to analyse the jokes published in these three sister magazines, namely *You*, *Huisgenoot* and *Drum* to establish, firstly, whether there was any correlation amongst the jokes published on a weekly basis and, secondly, to establish whether these jokes reflected the different readership of these magazines. From this, we surmised that we would be able to begin to deduce what constitutes South African humour and whether different cultural groupings found different topics funny, or whether the jokes were the same in each issue. The deductive method was consequently used for the analysis, as previous coding is in existence (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). However, our conclusions are based on an induced interpretation of the data, as we have made generalised inferences about the contents of the texts.

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<sup>9</sup> Retrieved from [www.mysubs.co.za/magazine/you](http://www.mysubs.co.za/magazine/you).

## Findings

For our analysis, each joke was categorised according to Berger's (2016) typology of 45 techniques of humour, which are classified into four categories: namely, jokes involving language, jokes involving logic, jokes involving identity and jokes involving action. These techniques are listed and described in Table 1. We used Berger's classification as he argues that these techniques are universal and can be found in all humorous texts from across cultures.

Our analysis revealed that the jokes in the magazines selected for our investigation conformed to these techniques as described by Berger, yet we could not find evidence of all the techniques. This, possibly, is because of the limitations of our study, but it may also be because these techniques could result in offensive jokes.

Out of the 45 techniques we found evidence of 13 being used in the magazines analysed. We did not find evidence of jokes containing, for example, ridicule, satire, bombast, embarrassment and insults.

Table 1 gives an overview of the techniques that we found in these jokes during our analysis, as well as a description of the meaning of each. These descriptions have been adopted from Berger's original explanations (Berger, 2013).

**Table 1.** *Brief Description of the Techniques Used over a Four Week Period*

<b>Facetiousness</b>	Treating a serious issue with inappropriate humour. Jokes in this category could also be considered flippant (do not take the situation seriously). Also considered "tongue-in-cheek"; not want to be taken literally; non-serious use of language.
<b>Over literalness</b>	Excessively literal behaviour resulting in a comedic effect.
<b>Puns/Wordplay</b>	Playing with the meaning of words.
<b>Repartee</b>	Verbal banter, usually in a witty dialogue (word play/light sparring with words).
<b>Sarcasm</b>	Biting remark made with a hostile tone.
<b>Ignorance</b>	Lack of knowledge or understanding of a situation.
<b>Misunderstanding</b>	A failure to understand something/mistake as to meaning or intent. A problem caused by someone not understanding or interpreting a situation correctly. People are often confused by things.
<b>Repetition</b>	Repeating a situation for comedic effect.
<b>Reversal</b>	One meaning unexpectedly gives way to another meaning.
<b>Theme/Variation</b>	Situation where a belief or an activity is used to show how different nationalities, religions, members of society vary with regard to this belief or activity. The humour is as a result of the variance displayed by the groups and with the use of stereotypes.
<b>Stereotype</b>	Generalised way of depicting certain characteristics of a nation, gender or other group/set idea about what someone is like/a preconceived idea – racist, sexist, homophobic.
<b>Exaggeration</b>	Overreaction to a situation or statement; reacting in an exaggerated way; exaggerating the qualities of someone or

	something.
<b>Absurdity</b>	This technique is based on logic and irrationality; life is seen to be filled with illogical, crazy situations.

Our content analysis of the written jokes in *You*, *Huisgenoot*, and *Drum* magazines yielded the results as set out in Table 2. It is important to note that the number of jokes does not correspond to the number of techniques used, because each joke may contain more than one technique.

**Table 2.** *Week One: Issue 10 November 2016 Contained a Total of 10 Jokes in You Magazine, 14 in Huisgenoot and 20 in Drum Magazine*<sup>10</sup>

<b>Technique</b>	<b><i>You</i></b>	<b><i>Huisgenoot</i></b>	<b><i>Drum</i></b>
<i>Facetiousness</i>	3 jokes	3 jokes	10 jokes
<i>Over Literalness</i>	-	2 jokes	4 jokes
<i>Puns/Wordplay</i>	2 jokes	4 jokes	13 jokes
<i>Repartee</i>	1 joke	3 jokes	11 jokes
<i>Sarcasm</i>	1 joke	2 jokes	5 jokes
<i>Ignorance</i>	2 jokes	5 jokes	-

A total of 44 jokes were published in Week One. The majority of the jokes published were from *Drum*, with the least number of jokes from *You*. The publication of the jokes is simply a matter of available space and does not reflect the sense of humour of the readers. Most of the jokes in *You* and *Drum* contained facetiousness, whereas ignorance was the prevalent technique in *Huisgenoot*.

The predominant themes in *Huisgenoot* were based on relationships between men and women, as well as the use of alcohol. The majority of the themes used in *Drum* showed an equal distribution between jokes about relationships and jokes about the workplace. The dominant theme in *You* was jokes involving animals.

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<sup>10</sup> Good Laughs. 2016. *Drum* #253, 10 November 2016, pp. 58-60; Lag 'n Slag. 2016. *Huisgenoot* #1013, 10 November 2016 p. 77; Laugh a Little. 2016. *You* #518, 10 November 2016, p. 67.

**Table 3.** *Week Two: Issue 17 November 2016 Contained 13 Jokes in You Magazine, 12 Jokes in Huisgenoot and Nine Jokes in Drum*<sup>11</sup>

<b>Technique</b>	<b>You</b>	<b>Huisgenoot</b>	<b>Drum</b>
<i>Facetiousness</i>	2 jokes	2 jokes	3 jokes
<i>Misunderstanding</i>	1 joke	4 jokes	-
<i>Over Literalness</i>	2 jokes	2 jokes	2 jokes
<i>Puns/Wordplay</i>	3 jokes	1 joke	4 jokes
<i>Repartee</i>	1 joke	-	4 jokes
<i>Sarcasm</i>	-	3 jokes	1 joke
<i>Repetition</i>	5 jokes	5 jokes	1 joke
<i>Reversal</i>	-	5 jokes	-
<i>Theme/variation</i>	5 jokes	-	-
<i>Stereotype</i>	3 jokes	-	-

Table 3 shows the breakdown in techniques used in the 34 jokes published in Week Two. In this week, the jokes were more evenly distributed across the three magazines. Jokes containing the repetition technique were more frequent in *You* and *Huisgenoot*. The reversal technique was only used in *Huisgenoot*, whilst only *You* used the theme/variation and stereotype techniques. *Drum*'s jokes made use of the puns/wordplay and repartee techniques. No dominant themes were present in the jokes published in Week Two, with themes ranging from relationships to transport, crime and animals.

**Table 4.** *Week Three: Issue 24 November 2016 Contained No Jokes in You Magazine, 44 Jokes in Huisgenoot and 11 Jokes in Drum*<sup>12</sup>

<b>Technique</b>	<b>You</b>	<b>Huisgenoot</b>	<b>Drum</b>
<i>Exaggeration</i>	-	3 jokes	-
<i>Misunderstanding</i>	-	4 jokes	1 joke
<i>Puns/Wordplay</i>	-	15 jokes	5 jokes
<i>Repartee</i>	-	2 jokes	6 jokes
<i>Sarcasm</i>	-	3 jokes	2 jokes
<i>Absurdity</i>	-	5 jokes	-
<i>Reversal</i>	-	4 jokes	3 jokes

Table 4 shows a breakdown of the techniques used in the 55 jokes published in Week Three. There were no jokes in *You*, 44 in *Huisgenoot* and only 11 in *Drum*. The majority of the jokes in *Huisgenoot* made use of the puns/wordplay technique, whereas there were six instances of repartee in the *Drum* and six of puns/wordplay.

There is no prevalent theme evident in *Drum*, but jokes about male/female relationships are common in *Huisgenoot*.

<sup>11</sup> Good Laughs. 2016. *Drum* #254, 17 November 2016, pp. 58-59; Lag 'n Slag. 2016. *Huisgenoot* #1014, 17 November 2016, p. 79; Laugh a Little. 2016. *You* #519, 17 November 2016, pp. 72-73.

<sup>12</sup> Good Laughs. 2016. *Drum* #255, 24 November 2016, pp. 74-75; Lag 'n Slag. 2016. *Huisgenoot* #1015, 24 November 2016, pp. 88-89; Laugh a Little. 2016. *You* #520, 24 November 2016.

**Table 5.** *Week 4: Issue 1 December 2016 Contained 14 Jokes in You, 19 Jokes in Huisgenoot and 16 Jokes in Drum*<sup>13</sup>

<b>Technique</b>	<b>You</b>	<b>Huisgenoot</b>	<b>Drum</b>
<i>Facetiousness</i>	1 joke	2 jokes	5 jokes
<i>Misunderstanding</i>	4 jokes	1 joke	2 jokes
<i>Over Literalness</i>	3 jokes	4 jokes	5 jokes
<i>Puns/Wordplay</i>	2 jokes	7 jokes	7 jokes
<i>Repartee</i>	1 joke	9 jokes	7 jokes
<i>Reversal</i>	-	3 jokes	4 jokes

There were not as many techniques used in this week as in previous weeks, even though 59 jokes were published. Jokes containing misunderstanding were most obvious in *You*. Repartee was used for the majority of the jokes in *Huisgenoot* and *Drum*, but *Drum* also had an equal number of jokes containing puns/wordplay.

Themes most prevalent in *You* were about children and blondes. The major theme in *Huisgenoot* was, once again, about relationships between men and women, whereas the jokes in *Drum* were about family and short one-line jokes for the family.

The majority of the jokes used in all three of these magazines fell into two categories: jokes using Language and jokes using Logic as described by Berger (2016). There was no predominant theme amongst the jokes published across all the magazines (Table 5).

**Table 6.** *Summary of Techniques Used Over a Four Week Period*

<b>Technique</b>	<b>Week 1</b>	<b>Week 2</b>	<b>Week 3</b>	<b>Week 4</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Facetiousness</i>	16	7	-	8	<b>31</b>
<i>Over Literalness</i>	6	6	-	12	<b>24</b>
<i>Puns/Wordplay</i>	19	8	20	16	<b>63</b>
<i>Repartee</i>	15	5	8	17	<b>45</b>
<i>Sarcasm</i>	3	4	5	-	<b>12</b>
<i>Ignorance</i>	7	-	-	-	<b>7</b>
<i>Misunderstanding</i>	-	5	5	7	<b>17</b>
<i>Repetition</i>	-	11	-	-	<b>-</b>
<i>Reversal</i>	-	5	7	7	<b>19</b>
<i>Theme/variation</i>	-	5	-	-	<b>5</b>
<i>Stereotype</i>	-	3	-	-	<b>3</b>
<i>Exaggeration</i>	-	-	3	-	<b>3</b>
<i>Absurdity</i>	-	-	5	-	<b>5</b>

As can be seen from Table 6, the majority of jokes contained puns/ wordplay followed closely by jokes containing repartee.

<sup>13</sup> Good Laughs. 2016. *Drum* #256, 1 December 2016, pp. 84, 87; Lag 'n Slag. 2016. *Huisgenoot* #1016, 1 December 2016, pp. 60-61; Laugh a Little. 2016. *You* #521, 1 December 2016, pp. 91-93.

## Discussion

The purpose of our study was twofold: to investigate the different ways that humour had been used in these texts and to look at the similarities and differences between them. The aim was to establish whether one can talk about a truly South African humour based on the analysis of the jokes in these magazines, or whether these jokes rather reflect the cultural diversity of the country and thus emphasise the differences between cultures.

On analysis, it was evident that some jokes contained a cluster of techniques, as defined by Berger (1998), whereas other techniques, such as puns/wordplay, were able to stand alone to generate humour. The most frequently used humour technique and the simplest category in all of the magazines was the use of puns or wordplay followed closely by repartee and facetiousness. The pun, which is regarded as the simplest form of the joke (Jewell, 2005), relies heavily on a play on the meaning of words. Very often, a scenario or set of expectations would be created before the delivery of the punch line, which would be unexpected and involve the mispronunciation of or alternative use of a word requiring the reader to shift their frame of reference.

The repartee jokes used in the three magazines made use of light, witty verbal banter and were particularly evident in the "Knock knock" and one-liner jokes, whilst the facetious jokes dealt mainly with situations that were not to be taken too seriously. Many of the "knock knock" jokes could also be considered reversal jokes as one meaning unexpectedly gave way to another, for example,

Knock, knock.  
Who's there?  
Beats.  
Beats who?  
Beats me.<sup>14</sup>

or

Knock, knock.  
Who's there?  
Yah!  
Yah who?  
Well, no thanks, I prefer Google.<sup>15</sup>

Reversal jokes in the magazines were often characterised by a change in meaning. These were all jokes which relied heavily on the use of language for impact. An example of this would be:

An efficiency expert concludes his lecture with a note of caution. "You don't want to try these techniques at home."

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<sup>14</sup> Good Laughs. *Drum* #254, 17 November 2016, p. 59.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

"Why not?" asks someone from the back of the room.

"I watched my wife's routine at breakfast for years," the expert explains. "She made lots of trips to the fridge, stove, table and cabinets, often carrying just a single item at a time. So I suggested she try carrying several things at once."

The voice at the back of the class asks, "Did it save time?"

"Actually, yes," the expert replies. "It used to take her twenty minutes to get breakfast ready. Now I do it in seven."<sup>16</sup>

The stereotypical jokes used were the Chuck Norris and blonde jokes. However, only three of these jokes were used. This may indicate reluctance on the side of the publisher to offend anybody, including blondes.

All the jokes used in these magazines were similar in nature. They all had the same purpose – to make us laugh. There were no distinguishing features that could classify them into one particular genre. The main difference was that the number of jokes published in each magazine per week was inconsistent, varying from one week to the next. The one peculiar feature was that *You Magazine* did not publish any jokes in the 24 November 2016 issue. There was no indication as to why this occurred, except for the journalistic convention of using extra space for unimportant texts. An analysis of the total number of jokes published over the four week period indicates that *Huisgenoot* published 89 jokes, *Drum* 56 jokes, and *You* 37 jokes. This, however, does not indicate that Afrikaans speakers have a better sense of humour or that they are more in need of comic relief.

All the magazines in the study used jokes with similar themes, ranging from marriage, children, and relationships to blonde or women jokes, church or religious jokes, animal jokes, knock knock jokes and Chuck Norris jokes. These themes are innocuous, and would not offend even the most unsophisticated of minds. The only offensive jokes may be those relating to blonde hair.

Our expectation when conducting this text analysis was that we would find that the jokes published in each magazine would reflect their readership. This would mean that each magazine would carry jokes that are culture specific; for example, *Huisgenoot* would have jokes that would only be understood by Afrikaans speaking people, *Drum* would have jokes for so-called African people, and *You* would have jokes for English speaking people. Looking at texts that came from a pre-supposed variety of cultural groups, we felt, was a good way of examining how context could affect humour.

However, this was not so. The focus on the weekly joke section was non-threatening and represented a safe middle ground. The only indication of readership was the "Little Jabu" jokes published in *Drum* and the Van der Merwe jokes in *Huisgenoot*. "Little Jabu" is an Africanisation of the "Little Johnny/Klein Jannie" jokes, whereas Van der Merwe refers to the stereotypical Afrikaans speaking person. The types of jokes represented in these magazines

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<sup>16</sup> Good Laughs. *Drum* #256, 1 December 2016, p. 84.

were related to issues that happen in our everyday lives: the mishaps, comic asides, facetious comments, children's actions and silly occurrences.

These magazines did not reflect the reality of the jokes told in the public domain, such as the many jokes about President Jacob Zuma, the most notable ones being the showerhead and his inability to use figures,<sup>17</sup> or the fact that South Africans make jokes about very serious matters.

Laughing, however innocent and politically correct, is seen as a balm for our souls. What is positive is that laughing and making others laugh is a way to break down cultural barriers. The jokes in these magazines provide the reader with an opportunity to laugh with someone and not at them.

## Conclusion

We believe that this study provides a valuable starting point for the analysis of humour as a means to establish whether there was a national identity that could be detected through the humour portrayed in the jokes sections of these three magazines. Whilst humour often "represents a process of negotiating the geopolitical order" (Ridanpää, 2009), the only evidence we could find of establishing a specific ideological agenda was in the generic similarity of the jokes. We thus could not find confirmation that the magazines studied were used as ideological apparatus in order to build a new nation after apartheid. Further research on this aspect is therefore necessary.

Racism and hate speech are serious issues in any country. In a rainbow nation such as ours, with a multitude of cultures and religious beliefs, humour could be used to discuss controversial issues that we would not normally consider without fear of judgment or criticism. People pay more attention to something that is humorous, rather than something which is factual or serious, and humour should be seen as a means of cultural reconciliation. "When people treat their cultural differences - and the conflicts and tensions that arise from them - as opportunities to seek a more accurate view of themselves, each other and the situation, trust builds and relationships become stronger" (Ely, Meyerson, & Davidson, 2006).

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<sup>17</sup>Jacob Zuma jokes here!! Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2HmF9SZ>.



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