

## Comparative Summary

**Step 1.** The following summary was written in response to the following below. Read it. How is it organized? Is this organization effective?

Discuss Wilson (1979) and Ziv (1984) as they relate to the social function of humor. In what ways are they similar? How do they differ?

### Comparative Summary 1

In *Jokes: Form, Content, Use, and Function*, Wilson states that humor has a variety of both personal and social functions. For example, it may be used to lower hostility levels, to rebel, or to raise sensitive issues. Regardless of the reason, the audience may actually choose whether to laugh. The broader, social function of joking is to simply maintain the status quo. People joke to reduce friction and anxiety as well as to ridicule others in a relatively safe way. Joking can be a way for minorities to release frustrations about being in less powerful positions. Wilson also notes that there is usually a pecking order or hierarchy in humor. Superiors jokes about their subordinates. Those within a certain group joke about those outside the group. Joking is often directed at those in positions perceived as subordinate.

Ziv, in *Personality and Sense of Humor* sees the social function as one of control and maintaining or establishing rapport. Joking is a way to maintain social order. People joke about outsiders—people not in the mainstream. Jokes also arise when social norms have not been adhered to. People, therefore, act “appropriately” so as not to become the victim of a joke. Jokes are also a reflection of social hierarchy. People in “higher” positions joke about those in “lower” positions. While the former may freely joke about the latter, the latter may joke about the former only in private. For those in a “lower” position, then, humor is a way to relieve tensions and frustrations. Ziv goes on to say that joking can be a means of narrowing social distance. The inside jokes of a group are a part of the identities of the individual members.

**Step 2.** Write a comparative summary discussing Wilson (1979) and Ziv (1984) as they relate to the social function of humor. Be sure to highlight the similarities and differences in both authors’ views.

**One useful strategy** is to set up a chart with the key points the articles you are comparing address. Try to make connections between the main points. In what way are they similar? How are they different?

**Step 3.** Read Comparative Summary 2. How is it organized? Compare it with the first summary. In what ways is it different?

### **Comparative Summary 2**

Wilson and Ziv both maintain that humor serves a social function. For one, jokes reveal the social hierarchy. The authors agree that superiors freely joke about those in lesser positions. Subordinates, including minority groups, can privately joke about those in “higher” positions in order to reduce tension and feelings of frustration. For another, humor is beneficial for a group. Although Ziv more clearly explains this point, Wilson would agree that joking about nongroup members can not only help unify a group, but can also play a role in establishing individual identities.

While both Wilson and Ziv analyze joking in terms of relationships among individuals, Ziv has a somewhat broader view. Ziv argues that humor is a way to exert social control. Jokes frequently focus on situations where social norms have been broken. Therefore, in order to avoid becoming the victim of a joke, people tend to follow social conventions.