

Advice is cheap...except when you consult a doctor or lawyer or tax accountant”: lawyers, doctors and representatives of other professions in American lawyer jokes

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Abstract:

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Background of research

In the early 1980s, a new joke cycle appeared in the USA, and has continued to flourish ever since. This is a lawyer joke cycle. Lawyer jokes have been published in book form (to name just a few, see Wilde 1982, Knott 1990, and Galanter 2005), and have also been displayed on various American websites. According to a 1997 Internet search by a legal journalist 3,473 sites were devoted to lawyer jokes (Yas 1997: 11), while only 17 sites displayed jokes about salesmen, 39 sites accountant jokes, and 227 sites doctor jokes. Theo Meder explains the sharp increase of lawyer jokes in recent years by the high legalization of American society. He stresses: “the quantity of lawyer jokes equals the rise of the number and the social status of lawyers, the excessive wages of top-lawyers and their sky-high compensation claims” (Meder 2008: 448). According to his opinion, this cannot be the only reason for such an expansion of lawyer jokes. “There are feelings of discontent about the impenetrable logic of justice, but above all the dominant “vulture culture” of *suing*, *claiming* and *cashing*, as exposed in the news media” (Meder 2008: 449). Christie Davies even goes further, stating:

America is government not by men but by lawyers...Lawyers lie at the very heart of American society. American lawyers are the most American of Americans, and they represent the central American values of social mobility – as opposed to entrenched and inherited distinctions – and entail – due process and procedure as opposed to personal discretion and, of course, the pursuit of money. The lawyers *are* the very essence of what it means to be an American. (Davies 2008: 373)

As Marc Galanter points out, before 1980, the vast majority of jokes about lawyers dealt with topics such as “lawyers corrupting discourse, fleecing clients, fomenting strife, fraternizing with the devil, and compromising justice” (Galanter 2008: 390). The jokes which have added

to the corpus since 1980 were joined by “a new set of themes – jokes about lawyers as morally deficient, as betrayers of trust, as objects of scorn, and as desirable candidates for extermination” (Galanter 2008: 390). According to Galanter, almost two thirds of the jokes which have added to the corpus since 1980 belong to these “new wave” categories (Galanter 2008: 390).

The aggressive tendency in jokes has been known of at least since publication of Sigmund Freud’s essay, “Wit and Humor in the Unconscious” in 1905 (see Freud 1960 [1905]), and has also been discussed by many humour researchers. Hostility towards law and lawyers has been a widespread phenomenon for a long time throughout the world. Grant Gilmore in “The Ages of American Law” stresses: “In most societies at most periods the legal profession has been heartily disliked by all non-lawyers: a recurrent dream of social reformers has been that the law should be (and can be) simplified and purified in such a way that the class of lawyers can be done away with. The dream has never withstood the cold light of waking reality” (Gilmore 1977: 1). The book entitled “Devil’s Advocates: The Unnatural History of Lawyers” (Roth–Roth 1989) has shown a terrible scorn heaped on lawyers throughout human history, and has even questioned the reasons why civilization has put up with lawyers at all. This compilation of negative anecdotes about lawyers from early times to the present includes numerous passages from the Bible, from literature, and, moreover, from the mouths of lawyers themselves. In 1911 the following humorous definition of a lawyer appeared: “LAWYER, n. One skilled in circumvention of the law” (Bierce 1911, in Horrigan 2003: 64; see also <http://www.dict.org/bin/Dict>). This definition has been quoted in many legal books. The famous quotation “The first thing we do, let’s kill all the lawyers” by William Shakespeare (Henry VI, Part 2) has provided fruitful soil for endless transformation, as in the titles of newspaper articles about lawyers, e.g. “First Thing We Do Is Kill All the Lawyer Jokes” (Yas 1997: 11), “Modest Alternative to Killing All Lawyers” (Miller 1991: A16). The hostile titles of some books of jokes or cartoons about lawyers also speak for themselves, e.g. “Dead Lawyers and Other Pleasant Thoughts” (Miller 1993); “Truly Tasteless Lawyer Jokes” (Knott 1990). The perennial criticism of attorneys is illustrated as “amoral [...] guns for hire” (Horrigan 2003: 64).

In “Legal Ethics: A Comparative Study” (Hazard & Dondi 2004) common complaints about lawyers from around the world were classified into five general categories:

- abuse of litigation in various ways, including using dilatory tactics and false evidence and making frivolous arguments to the courts;
- preparation of false documentation, such as false deeds, contracts, or wills;
- deceiving clients and other persons and misappropriating property;
- procrastination in dealings with clients; and
- charging excessive fees. (Hazard & Dondi 2004: 60)

At the end of the 20th century the dominant theme of American lawyer jokes was summarized as: “Lawyers are hard to understand; they charge too much; they are miserable people; they lie all the time; and they should die” (Yas 1997: 11), and that “lawyers are clever, tricky, greedy and untrustworthy” (Galanter 1998: 827; for more on the stereotypical traits of lawyers, see Galanter 1998, 2005, 2008, Davies 2008, T. Litovkina 2011).

Without any doubt, the lawyer is the most popular profession being a target of Anglo-American anti-proverbs (or proverb transformation, see Mieder & Tóthné Litovkina 1999; T. Litovkina & Mieder 2006). The greatest anger and irritation are directed at the cost of lawsuits, the high income of lawyers, their fondness of money and greed:

Where there's a will there's a lawyer's bill. {Where there's a will there's a way}¹

Practice does not make a lawyer perfect, but enough of it will make him rich. {Practice makes perfect}

After a man has had occasion to employ a first-class lawyer it is useless to tell him that talk is cheap. {Talk is cheap}

The havoc created by an ignorant lawyer is a common theme:

Lawyers are the only persons in whom ignorance of the law is not punished. {Ignorance of the law is no excuse}

As a student in law school, they called him “Necessity” because he knew no law. {Necessity knows no law}

The focus of the present study

¹ For the reader's ease all anti-proverbs in this article are followed by their original forms, given in {} brackets. The anti-proverbs quoted here (with references to their sources) can be found in the book “Old Proverbs Never Die, They Just Diversify: A Collection of Anti-Proverbs” (see T. Litovkina & Mieder 2006).

There is a wide range of professions and occupations depicted in American lawyer jokes, along with the career of a lawyer. Very frequently lawyers show up together with professionals who, similarly to them, are also assumed to have skills based on extensive theoretical knowledge, and professions which also enjoy a high social status, regard and esteem (e.g. medicine, scripture, accounting, or engineering). Most frequently, a figure of a lawyer shows up simultaneously with his eternal rival, a doctor (or physician, or other medical person²). It is not surprising, since these two professions are considered to be two of the most preferred, prestigious and valued professions in the American society. Accountants, engineers and priests are very frequent companions of lawyers and doctors in American lawyer jokes. There are many other professions and occupations subjected to mockery in lawyer jokes. In some jokes only a representative of one profession shows up in together with an attorney. Some other jokes, however, bring three or more professions together.

The present study makes an attempt to analyze stereotypical traits of lawyers compared to those of doctors and representatives of other professions, according to American lawyer jokes. In all the jokes selected for this study a lawyer is accompanied by a doctor. While in some jokes there are only representatives of the profession of law and medicine, in some other jokes, along with the figure of a lawyer and doctor, representatives of other professions and occupations also show up. The vast majority of jokes were collected from hundreds of websites in spring 2009. All the jokes quoted and discussed in the article are given with references to their sources.

While certain stereotypical traits occur pervasively in the texts of the jokes, others appear in only a few. For this reason, my discussion might sometimes seem uneven and the treatment of certain thematic categories might seem to be either narrower or broader. It must also be mentioned here that a number of our jokes treat several themes simultaneously. Such examples could be discussed in various parts of the present study.

Discussion

Many parents dream their children choose a career of medicine or law, which will definitely bring them financial success (or in case of females, they achieve high status and financial wellbeing by simply marrying a doctor or a lawyer):

² E.g. laboratory workers, medical scientists, nurses, chiropractors, etc.

When you grow up, son, you can be whatever you want – a lawyer or a doctor. (caption to a cartoon)

<http://www.lawyer-jokes.us/modules/news/index.php?storytopic=3>

Especially popular these two professions are with Jewish parents:

Two Jewish women meet on the street, one with children. The other says, “Such beautiful children how old are they?”

“The doctor is seven and the lawyer is five.” (Dundes 1987: 124)

The joke below also expresses many parents’ wish that their child should be either a doctor or a lawyer:

Children who never come when called will grow up to be doctors. Children who come before they are called will grow up to be lawyers.

<http://www.9timezones.com/ia/law.htm>

On the one hand, it is not desirable to come uncalled, on the other hand, it is not good either not to come at all when it’s needed. Thus, the joke above stresses the opinion folk have about doctors and lawyers: while the first ones are never there when needed (i.e. when one is sick), the latter ones, being pushy and arrogant, always show up before one needs them (e.g. in cases when lawyers chase ambulance cars, or immediately after an accident, or even during it start distributing business cards).

What happens to a Jewish boy who can’t stand the sight of blood and who stutters? Unfortunately he cannot become a lawyer, and he cannot become a doctor either. Therefore, according to the joke below, the only prestigious profession left for him is the career of an accountant:

What is the definition of a C.P.A. (Certified Public Accountant)?

It’s a Jewish boy who can’t stand the sight of blood and who stutters. (Dundes 1987: 124)

A lot of texts in our corpus deal with the theme of lawyers' greed, stinginess, and their fondness of money. The following anti-proverb will help me to prove the point:

The lawyer agrees with the doctor that the best things in life are fees. {The best things in life are free}

The anti-proverb above employs a technique of punning, one of the most popular techniques of eliciting humour in jokes and proverb transformations: a word "free" is substituted by its paronym, the word "fees", which sounds and is spelled similarly but not identically and is also antonymous to it, thus completely negating the meaning of the original text.

Nowadays, American lawyers' fees are proportionally high compared to the services supplied. Not surprisingly, quite a lot of jokes and anti-proverbs treat this topic. In the following anti-proverb lawyers, doctors and tax accountants – the choice left to the "Jewish boy who can't stand the sight of blood and who stutters" from one of the joke above – are shown again, this time as extremely greedy in their pursuit of money:

Advice is cheap...except when you consult a doctor or lawyer or tax accountant. {Advice is cheap}

Lawyers, similarly to other blood-sucking real and mythological beings (e.g. ticks, leeches, or vampires, for more on the lawyer as animal in American lawyer jokes, see T. Litovkina 2010a, 2010c) are depicted as sucking people's blood:

Stanley Livingston, in deepest Africa, finds a cannibal restaurant. The specialty of the day is brains – fried doctor brains for twenty bucks, sautéed architect brains for twenty-five bucks, and roasted attorney brains for two hundred bucks. Livingston, perplexed, asks the waiter why the attorney brains are so costly. The waiter snorts, "Do you know what a job it is to clean those suckers?"

http://jokes.maxabout.com/jid0003938/stanley_livingston_in_deepest.aspx

Naturally "sucking blood" in American lawyer jokes is a metaphor for lawyers sucking their clients' energy and spirit, as well as pumping them of their money. The text above touches upon the topic of the price for attorney brains. The brains are to be consumed in a cannibal

restaurant, i.e. the joke has a theme of eradicating of lawyers (the topic very popular in American lawyer jokes, see the last four jokes of the present study). In this text attorney roasted attorney brains are ten times more expensive than fried doctor brains, or eight times more expensive than sautéed architect brains. What is the reason for such price difference? The answer is hidden in the punchline.

Extorting their clients' money and simultaneously taking sexual advantage over them is a theme of many lawyer jokes. In quite a number of lawyer jokes combining topics *sexuality* and *money grabbing*, the word "screw" is used as a pun. The word, among many other connotations, has the following two: (a) "to extort or practice extortion on; as, he screwed me out of money. [Slang.]"³; or (b) "to have sexual intercourse with. [Slang.]"⁴). The following text playing on these connotations brings up a parallel of a lawyer with a chiropractor:

A lawyer is standing in a long line at the box office. Suddenly, he feels a pair of hands kneading his shoulders, back, and neck. The lawyer turns around. "What the hell do you think you're doing?" "I'm a chiropractor, and I'm just keeping in practice while I'm waiting in line." "Well, I'm a lawyer, but you don't see me screwing⁵ the guy in front of me, do you?"

<http://www.iligan.gov.ph/forum/index.php?topic=384.0>

As we can see, contrarily to the chiropractor, the lawyer from the joke above is not trying to "keep in practice" while waiting in line and, thus, he is not screwing the guy in front of him.

³ This connotation is listed in Webster under N 5 (Webster 1983: 1629).

⁴ This connotation is listed in Webster under N 6 (Webster 1983: 1629).

⁵ A number of American lawyer jokes draw parallels between the law and prostitution. Indeed, the two careers have very similar features: while prostitutes perform sexual activities for payment, lawyers, despite personal dislike or dishonor, falsifying facts and reshaping reality, also perform their activities for money. Stereotypically, those who sell sex for money are seen as trash. And what about the lawyers, who sell their principles, knowledge and ethics? Not surprisingly, according to our material, the legal profession, the services the lawyers provide, their professional ethics, as well as their fees, all seem less favorable than those of prostitutes: the lawyers are the object of more scorn. As we can see from the two text below, the two different connotations of the word "screw", which have already been discussed above, are played upon again:

Q: What's the difference between a prostitute and an attorney?

A: Both of them screw you, but the attorney gets paid twice as much to do it...

<http://www.9timezones.com/ia/lawques.htm>

Two questions might arise here: Which of the two meanings of the word “screw” discussed above is the lawyer referring to? If he were able to do it under such circumstances, would he still resist it?

Being depicted as hungry for money, lawyers are called thieves in a number of jokes⁶ (as well as in the titles of some books about lawyers, e.g. as “Lawyers and Thieves”, see Grutman–Thomas 1990). When the dying man from the joke below asks his physician and his lawyer to stand on both sides of his hospital bed, and closes his eyes and is silent, we expect him to express his infinite gratitude to both of them. Instead, he compares himself to Jesus who “died with a thief on either side”. Thus, the joke clearly states that both the lawyer and doctor are thieves in his eyes:

A man woke up in a hospital bed and called for his doctor. He asked, “Give it to me straight. How long have I got?” The physician replied that he doubted that the man would survive the night. The man then said, “Call for my lawyer.” When the lawyer arrived, the man asked for his physician to stand on one side of the bed, while the lawyer stood on the other. The man then laid back and closed his eyes. When he remained silent for several minutes, the physician asked what he had in mind. The man replied “Jesus died with a thief on either side. I just thought I’d check out the same way.”

<http://www.laughterbee.com/lawyer-jokes/a-man-woke-up-in-a-hospital-bed-and-called-for-his-doct.html>

Similar negative treatment of both a doctor and an attorney (though the lawyer is given favour) is found in the next joke in which the lawyer is called a “thief”, the doctor is called an “executioner”:

A lawyer and a physician had a dispute over precedence. They referred it to Diogenes, who gave it in favor of the lawyer as follows: “Let the thief go first, and the executioner follow.”

<http://xar.us/funny/lawyer/shortjokes.html>

⁶E.g.: If you see a lawyer on a bicycle, why don’t you swerve to hit him?
It might be your bicycle.

<http://jokeparty.com/>

The greatest anger and irritation in American lawyer jokes is directed at lawyers' skilful manipulation, cunning and dishonesty. Let's have a look at the following text describing endless fighting between the representatives of the two most preferred and valuable professions, the law and the medicine:

Two physicians boarded a flight out of Seattle. One sat in the window seat, the other sat in the middle seat. Just before takeoff, an attorney got on and took the aisle seat next to the two physicians. The attorney kicked off his shoes, wiggled his toes and was settling in when the physician in the window seat said, "I think I'll get up and get a Coke." "No problem," said the attorney, "I'll get it for you." While he was gone, one of the physicians picked up the attorney's shoe and spat in it. When he returned with the Coke, the other physician said, "That looks good, I think I'll have one too." Again, the attorney obligingly went to fetch it and while he was gone, the other physician picked up the other shoe and spat in it. The attorney returned and they all sat back and enjoyed the flight. As the plane was landing, the attorney slipped his feet into his shoes and knew immediately what had happened. "How long must this go on?" he asked. "This fighting between our professions? This hatred? This animosity? This spitting in shoes and urinating in Cokes?"
<http://www.dribbleglass.com/jokes/lawyers3.htm>

In the joke above both the lawyer and the doctors are shown as cunning, resourceful, and ready for anything in order to reach their goals (i.e., to do something bad and nasty to their professional rivals). In fact, they are depicted as misbehaving nasty children who find pleasure in "spitting in shoes and urinating in Cokes". If it is the lawyer who on a surface level tries to be helpful and offers a favour to the doctors, the doctors, while accepting his offer, silently misbehave. And it is the lawyer who in spite of his 'kind' offer, urinates in the doctors' Cokes. It is not enough that he does it but at the end of the joke he expresses his endless anger, irritation, and outrageousness because of the permanent fighting between the two professions. The last words of the joke show, however, that he is not a mere silent witness of this endless fighting, but he is an active participant of it, someone who adds oil to the fire of "fighting", "hatred", and "animosity". The joke shows that although both the lawyer and the doctors do equally nasty things, whereas the doctors don't express any indignation, the lawyer cynically shows his anger concerning the fight, and "spitting in shoes and urinating in Cokes". Thus, he behaves here in the most hypocritical way. His real behaviour and his words juxtapose each

other, very typical behaviour for lawyers in American lawyer jokes. He definitely follows the teaching of the proverb “Do as I say and not as I do” and not of the “Practice what you preach”.

Being depicted greedy and good manipulators, lawyers can easily grab their clients’ money. Indeed, there is even a belief that attorneys put their hands in their clients’ pockets, and try to turn them out of everything. In the joke below a doctor, a lawyer’s eternal rival, feeling irritated for being asked advice during a cocktail party, consults the lawyer, asking him what he usually does in a situation like this:

A doctor and a lawyer were attending a cocktail party when the doctor was approached by a man who asked advice on how to handle his ulcer. The doctor mumbled some medical advice, then turned to the lawyer and asked, “How do you handle the situation when you are asked for advice during a social function?”

“Just send an account for such advice” replied the lawyer.

On the next morning the doctor arrived at his surgery and issued the ulcer-stricken man a \$50 account. That afternoon he received a \$100 account from the lawyer.

<http://www.desi-jokes.com/>

What the doctor either doesn’t see (in this case he is damn stupid!) or deliberately doesn’t want to see (in this case he is canning, and tries to outwit the lawyer!) is that he does exactly the same thing he complains about – in order to get free advice he also disturbs another professional “during a social function”. There is no such thing as a free lunch, naturally, the doctor is punished for his wish to get the lawyer’s free advice. And here again, as in many other lawyer jokes discussed in the present article one of the most dominant themes of lawyer jokes reigns: Smart guy wins.

The personages of the following joke are a priest⁷, a doctor and a lawyer, representatives of professions most frequently needed when someone is dying:

⁷ While the profession of a priest has declined in its status and power, the profession of a lawyer has risen. The title of the book by Gawalt “The New High Priest: Lawyers in Post-Civil War America” (1984) suggests such changes. Just in vein with the following lines: “In tribal times, there were the medicine-men. In the Middle Ages, there were the priests. Today there are the lawyers” (Rodell 1939: 3).

An elderly man, 82, just returned from the doctors only to find he didn't have long to live. So he summoned the three most important people in his life to tell them of his fate.

1. His Doctor
2. His Priest
3. His Lawyer

Well, today I found out I don't have long to live. So I have summoned you three here, because you are the most important people in my life, and I need to ask a favor. Today, I am going to give each of you an envelope with \$50,000 dollars inside.

When I die, I would ask that all three of you throw the money into my grave. After the man passed on, the 3 people happened to run into each other. The doctor said, "I have to admit I kept \$10,000 dollars of his money, he owed me on lots of medical bills. But, I threw the other \$40,000 in like he requested."

The Priest said, "I have to admit also, I kept \$25,000 dollars for the church. It's all going to a good cause. I did, however, throw the other \$25,000 in the grave."

Well the Lawyer just couldn't believe what he was hearing! "I am surprised at you two taking advantage of him like that."

"I wrote a check for the full amount and threw it all in!!!"

http://www.jokesaboutdoctors.com/doctor_joke_sixteen.html

Naturally, the 82 year-old dying man entrusting three envelopes with \$50,000 dollars each to the lawyer, doctor and priest just in order to throw the money into his grave after his death, seem to be out of mind. As we know from folk wisdom, "There is no fool like an old fool". Maybe he thought when inviting all three of them at the same time that being each other's witnesses they would be ashamed to steal his money after his death? Even though how could he expect them to obey his last will? In particular, the lawyer, a notorious 'money grabber'? And what could stand in their way if he is dead? Naturally, nothing. And here all the three show their 'best' (sic) qualities as far as their trustfulness, honesty and reliability are concerned. Thus, all three of them behave in vein with the two jokes above in which lawyers were called thieves and steal money entrusted to them. Although none of the three most important people in the deceased man's life obeyed his last wish, while the doctor kept only one fifth of the entrusted money (the money he had owed him!), the priest kept half of the money for the church (and nothing for himself!), the lawyer kept the whole amount of money given to him. Again, in this joke the lawyer outsmarts the representatives of the other

professions. But in spite of the fact that he kept all the money, he expresses hypocritical words of indignation and talks about the other two taking advantage of the deceased man. Thus, this joke, similarly to the one about “spitting in shoes and pissing in Cokes”, is also a clear indignation of lawyers’ hypocrisy. In the world of this lawyer his noble and generous words go just juxtaposed to his real deeds.

One of negative traits of lawyers is that lawyers are extremely skilful at deceiving their clients, one way of which is through billing them for time they don’t spend on their cases, or for services they don’t provide to them:

Three proud mothers were describing the virtues of their children. The first said, “My daughter, the surgeon, has invented a new artificial liver that has saved the lives of countless patients.”

The second proudly proclaimed, “My son, the physicist, has developed a new energy source capable of heating thousands of homes with absolutely no pollution.”

“That is nothing,” replied the third, “my son the lawyer has discovered a new accounting system that allows him to bill clients for the time he spends on the golf course!”

<http://www.lawyer-jokes.us/modules/news/article.php?storyid=24>

Although the lawyer’s invention doesn’t save anyone’s life, as the doctor’s, or doesn’t help to solve energy crisis, as the physicist’s but, nevertheless, we understand that the mother of the lawyer has all the reasons to be ‘proud’ of her son’s invention: a discovery of “a new accounting system that allows him to bill clients for the time he spends on the golf course!” Similarly to the text below, the joke compares smartness and cunning of lawyers, compared with straightforwardness and nobility of the goals of a doctor and engineer. On the one hand, lawyers have less sympathies than doctors and representatives of other professions, on the other hand, we do appreciate lawyers for their inventiveness and cunning. The joke above also emphasizes another feature typically associated with the legal profession, i.e. snobbishness. Indeed, lawyers, more than representatives of any other profession or occupation, like showing off that they own luxurious yachts, villas, cars, watches, and other status symbols. Moreover, they like having expensive hobbies and pursuits such as playing golf.

As we have just seen from the joke above, lawyers might bill their clients for the service or time which haven’t been provided to them. Moreover, they can’t be beaten for making a

representative of another profession do the work trusted to them (naturally by paying them lower fees, and, thus, making significant profits):

NASA was interviewing professionals to be sent to Mars. Only one could go – and couldn't return to Earth.

The first applicant, an engineer, was asked how much he wanted to be paid for going. "A million dollars," he answered, "because I want to donate it to M.I.T."

The next applicant, a doctor, was asked the same question. He asked for \$2 million. "I want to give a million to my family," he explained, "and leave the other million for the advancement of medical research."

The last applicant was a lawyer. When asked how much money he wanted, he whispered in the interviewer's ear, "Three million dollars."

"Why so much more than the others?" asked the interviewer.

The lawyer replied, "If you give me \$3 million, I'll give you \$1 million, I'll keep \$1 million, and we'll send the engineer to Mars."

<http://www.lawyer-jokes.us/modules/news/article.php?storyid=29>

In the text above the lawyer "whispered in the interviewer's ear". By doing this he was willing to show his interviewer that he was ready to do anything to satisfy his financial needs in case he got the job. The fact that the lawyer was whispering naturally shows that he understands that this is prohibited kind of proposition. Although the lawyer's financial demands are higher than those of the engineer or doctor, by accepting the lawyer's application, the interviewer might profit himself, i.e. the lawyer is depicted as a notorious negotiator who thinks that everybody can be corrupted. The question is just the price. And just in vein with the "Every man has his price", the lawyer assumes the price of his interviewer is \$1 million.

Some of the most stereotypical traits of the legal profession – skillful ability to manipulate and persuade, as well as cunning and slyness – contrasted to the gullibility, naiveté and even stupidity of a doctor are reflected in the following joke:

Two cars, one driven by a lawyer and one by a doctor collide and a lot of damage is done, although neither driver is injured. It is impossible to decide who is to blame. Both drivers get out. The lawyer calls the police on his mobile phone; they'll be at the scene in 20 minutes. It's cold and wet, and both men are badly shaken up by the accident. The lawyer

offers the doctor a swig of brandy from his hip flask, the doctor drinks deeply and gives it back to the lawyer, who puts it away. “Aren’t you going to have a drink?” asks the doctor. “Not until after the police have gone,” replies the lawyer.

(The joke was downloaded from the Internet in fall 2008 but unfortunately wasn’t found while searched for reference later, in spring 2009)

The gullible, or even stupid, doctor accepts a swig of alcohol from the lawyer’s flask without suspecting that the lawyer has made his ‘hospitable’ gesture on purpose, so that the doctor should be accused by the police – who are just about to arrive – of driving in a drunken condition and, therefore, being responsible for the car accident. Therefore, another theme brought up in this and many other American lawyer jokes shows, i.e. lawyers should not be trusted under any circumstances.

One of the most basic stereotypes of a lawyer profession according to American lawyer jokes (see T. Litovkina 2011) is connected with lying and dishonesty. Let’s demonstrate it by a proper example. The following joke’s setting is the Riviera where both the doctor and the lawyer are vacationing:

A doctor vacationing on the Riviera met an old lawyer friend and asked him what he was doing there. The lawyer replied, “Remember that lousy real estate I bought? Well, it caught fire, so here I am with the fire insurance proceeds. What are you doing here?”

The doctor replied, “Remember that lousy real estate I had in Mississippi? Well, the river overflowed, and here I am with the flood insurance proceeds.” The lawyer looked puzzled. “Gee,” he asked, “how did you start the flood?”

<http://www.topfool.com/lawyerjokes.html>

As the doctor discovers, his old friend lawyer is vacationing there, because his fire insurance has paid for the loss of his real estate in fire. When the doctor says that he is there with his flood insurance proceeds, the lawyer just can’t hide his surprise and bemusement from the doctor, and looks extremely ‘puzzled’. The punchline of the joke (“how did you start the flood?”) is a clear indication that it was the ‘smart’ lawyer who had started the fire, in order to get fire insurance proceeds. And since being dishonest, he also expects that other people behave in a way similar to him, he shows his entire appreciation to the trick played by the

doctor. More than that, he even wants to know all the technicalities so that next time he could “start flood” himself.

Earlier in the study a joke was discussed in which a doctor asked a lawyer a piece of advice during a social function. The lawyer outwitted the doctor in that joke. Naturally, it is not only a doctor who might need a lawyer’s advice. Tables might be turned: a lawyer, when he is sick, might also need a doctor’s help. And whenever doctors can, they try to make a revenge according to the principle “tit for tat” (see a number of jokes in the present article, in particular, the last four). In spite of the fact that the vast majority of American lawyer jokes while having a theme “Smart guy wins”, stress lawyers’ cleverness, smartness, intelligence, and cunning (dominant traits lawyers are needed for), on the contrary, the sarcastic answer of the doctor from the joke below suggests quite opposite, i.e. some lawyers might be quite stupid (although stupidity is not their stereotypical feature):

A lawyer finds out he has a brain tumor, and it’s inoperable – in fact, it’s so large, they have to do a brain transplant. His doctor gives him a choice of available brains – there’s a jar of rocket scientist brains for \$10 an ounce, a jar of regular scientist brains for \$15 an ounce, and a jar of lawyer brains for the princely sum of \$800 an ounce. The outraged lawyer says, “This is a rip-off – how come the lawyer brains are so damned expensive?” The doctor replies, “Do you know how many lawyers it takes to get an ounce of brains?”
http://www.101funjokes.com/lawyer_joke_2.htm

The joke above also points out that scientists, in the doctor’s opinion, are much smarter than lawyers. As we learn from the text, the exceptionally high price for lawyer brains is due to the fact that it’s an extremely time-consuming task to find lawyers who have brains at all.⁸ And the numbers (10 and 15, as opposed to 800) just talk for themselves. If, however, we pay attention to the fact that the punchline of the joke is a sarcastic remark made by a doctor, a lawyer’s ancient rival in American lawyer jokes, we are not surprised. In the vast majority of jokes in which a lawyer appears together with a doctor, however, it’s the lawyer who outwits the doctor, and not vice versa.

⁸ Above we have already read about a very high price of attorney brains. It was, however, due to a different reason: it is very hard “to clean those suckers.”

The opinion of folk that lawyers just overcomplicate things, do unnecessary things, create “all of the chaos and confusion” is reflected in the following joke:

A physician, an engineer, and an attorney were discussing who among them belonged to the oldest of the three professions represented. The physician said, “Remember that, on the sixth day, God took a rib from Adam and fashioned Eve, making him the first surgeon. Therefore, medicine is the oldest profession.” The engineer replied, “But, before that, God created the heavens and earth from chaos and confusion, and thus he was the first engineer. Therefore, engineering is an older profession than medicine.” Then, the lawyer spoke up, “Yes, but who do you think created all of the chaos and confusion?”

<http://www.terry.co.uk/jokes02.html>

The joke below not only stresses that lawyers do unnecessary work but it also points out their great numbers:

There is a finite number of physicians that a population of fixed size will support. The same theory holds for teachers and engineers. However, this principle does not seem to apply to lawyers. The more you have, the more you need.

<http://www.terry.co.uk/jokes03.html>

Indeed, as statistics show, during 1980s the US experienced not only a dramatic increase in the number of lawyer jokes, but also in the number of lawyers. Thus, the number of lawyers in the United States has grown from 285,000 in 1960 to over one million at the beginning of the 21st century (Carson 2004: 1). Even before the American lawyer jokes’ explosion in the eighties, it was observed: “We already have at least 10 times as many lawyers as any rational society can tolerate, which doubtless accounts for the triumph of irrationality in American life” (Baker 1977: 12).

In America the shark image has been embraced by some lawyers as a totem, and a symbol of ferocity and power (for more on the lawyer as animal in American lawyer jokes, see T. Litovkina 2010a, 2010c). Among the features a lawyer and the emblematic predator, the shark have in common: both species are parasites and scavengers of the dead and dying, moreover, both lawyers and sharks are spineless and thick-skinned. Our next joke takes place at the seashore, a popular place for doctors and lawyers’ vacation (and not only when they are with

the fire or flood insurance proceeds!). There a doctor gets frightened and faints after seeing a shark fin⁹ which reminds him of a lawyer:

A doctor was vacationing at the seashore with his family. Suddenly, he spotted a fin sticking up in the water and fainted.

“Darling, it was just a shark,” assured his wife when he came to.

“You’ve got to stop imagining that there are lawyers everywhere.”

<http://www.resourcesforattorneys.com/lawyerjokes.html>

Naturally, the fear of the doctor is overexaggerated to grotesqueness. He can’t seriously think that there is a lawyer sticking his nose or another part of his body up out of the water! The joke’s message is that, in comparison to lawyers, sharks are less harmful—there is nothing to fear when one sees them. When one sees a lawyer (or even merely thinks he sees him!) it is entirely justified to express horror, and even to faint. So doctor’s vacation is ruined.

As it has been discussed elsewhere (see Galanter 2008, T. Litovkina 2009, 2010b), quite a serious segment of American lawyer jokes express fantasies of lawyers being removed from society, or even being entirely eradicated. There is more than one way to injure or kill a lawyer, e.g. through drowning, burying alive, hitting by car or bus, running off a cliff, cutting, shooting, using in medical experiments, laying on the equator, removal of kidneys, defenestration, and many others. Lawyers might be exterminated by being eaten, as it has been demonstrated by the joke in which i attorney brains are offered for consumption in a cannibal restaurant.

The butt of the following jokes are lawyers as candidates for removal from society or, more frequently, extermination. Those who try to get rid of them are representatives of medical profession. All the four jokes are a clear manifestation of the retaliation of doctors (as well as the personal working in ambulance cars, nurses, or scientists, and laboratory workers involved in medical experiments). One of the reasons for such revenge might be the fact that in American society, doctors are nowadays frequently sued by attorneys (for malpractice).

⁹ One can even find such parallels on T-shirts, comic signs and also in advertisements (Galanter 2002: 2229). According to Galanter, the term ‘shark’ with regard to ‘lawyer’ is not a modern invention: it was applied to lawyers before the mid-nineteenth century (Galanter 2008: 393). Not surprisingly, a lot of jokes and humorous texts displayed on different websites also embrace such parallels.

As we know from a number of jokes, a lawyer would do anything in order to get potential new clients, with pushiness and arrogance typical for his profession. Regardless of circumstances, whether it's immediately after a car accident, or during an emergency landing which might lead to a fatal catastrophe, attorneys try to pass out their business cards, in the hope of making money on mischief, tragedy, and death. Not surprisingly, such pushy and arrogant lawyers might be hit by ambulance cars:

Did you hear about the lawyer hurt in an accident?

An ambulance stopped suddenly.

http://www.x-stuff.org/jokes.php?joke=Did_you_hear_about_the_lawyer_hurt_in_an_accident

Q. Why is it that many lawyers have broken noses?

A. From chasing parked ambulances.

<http://www.skepticfiles.org/weird/lawyers.htm>

The text below suggests lawyers should be exterminated by being used in medical experiments instead of rats (for more on the lawyer as animal in American lawyer jokes, see T. Litovkina 2010a, 2010c). Similarly to the rat – a vicious, unclean, and parasitic animal, spreading disease, and associated in people's minds with aggression, war, and death, a pest which has to be exterminated – the joke¹⁰ below suggests that lawyers should also be in need of eradication:

The National Institute of Health has announced that it will no longer be using rats for medical experiments. In their place, they will use lawyers. They have given three reasons for this decision:

1. There are now more lawyers than there are rats.
2. The medical researchers don't become as emotionally attached to the lawyers as they did to the rats.
3. No matter how hard you try, there are some things that rats won't do.

<http://www.terry.co.uk/jokes01.html>

The fact that in deciding which (lawyers or rats) should be used for medical experiments (that is, be vivisected), clear preference is given to lawyers, indicates that similarly to rats lawyers

¹⁰ One can find dozens of variants of this joke on different websites.

are just pests which American society should remove. The three reasons¹¹ for such a preference are quite forthright, and don't need to be further explained.

The attorneys' sins discussed above, as well as elsewhere (see T. Litovkina 2011) contribute to the existence of quite a large segment of jokes about Hell¹² as the only place lawyers go after death, which has been the topic of another article (see chapter *After Death, Lawyers Go to Hell* in Litovkina 2009). Although the scene of the following joke is a hospital ward and not Hell, nevertheless it might be proper to quote and analyze it here:

As the lawyer woke up after surgery, he asked, 'Why are all the blinds drawn?'

The nurse answered, "There's a big fire across the street, and we didn't want you to think the operation was a failure."

<http://www.lawlaughs.com/hell/index.html>

The lawyer waking up after an operation is surprised to see the blinds are drawn. At first we might not understand why the nurse would care about the big fire outside, as well as its relevance to the patient. The nurse's answer, however, alludes to a popular belief that for their numerous sins, after death lawyers go to Hell. And since lawyers themselves, better than representatives of any other profession, know about their miserable fate, therefore, the operated patient should not be frightened by seeing the big fire outside. If he saw it upon waking up after the operation, he would think that his operation has not succeeded and, therefore, he has died and is in Hell. Thus, proper precautions have been made by the nurse, i.e., the blinds have been drawn. Although a great number of American jokes demonstrate the permanent fight between lawyers and doctors (as well as other medical personal including nurses and medical researchers), in the joke above, on the one hand, the thoughtful nurse tries to save her patient's life, and on the other hand, her answer, in a hidden form, still shows a popular belief that Hell is the place where lawyers go after they die. Thus, this joke pours more oil on the fire of hatred and scorn of representatives of medical professions directed towards lawyers.

¹¹ Some websites give even more reasons for such preferences.

¹² Some lawyer jokes on various websites are even grouped under the heading "Lawyers in Hell". As for example, on the following site: <http://www.lifeisajoke.com/miscellaneous17.html.htm>. This is consistent with some old English legal proverbs, sayings and comparisons: "Few lawyers die well", "Fair and softly as lawyer go to heaven", "The devil makes his Christmas pies of clerks' fingers and lawyers' tongues", etc. (for more on English legal proverbs, see Bond 1936).

Conclusion

This study has focused on one of the most common themes of American lawyer jokes, stereotypical features of lawyers compared to those of doctors and representatives of other professions and occupations. According to the jokes discussed above, the greatest anger and irritation in American lawyer jokes is directed at lawyers' skilful manipulation and cunning. Lawyers suck their clients' energy and spirit, and pump them of their money. Their high fees and greed are also common themes. Since lawyers are inveterate liars, they are not to be trusted under any circumstances. Attorneys frequently bill their clients for services and the time they don't provide to them. They frequently take sexual advantage of their own clients. They are pushy and arrogant. They do unnecessary things and overcomplicate everything. Among other vices lawyers possess are: hypocrisy, snobbishness, dishonesty, and corruption. These are only the main stereotypical traits of lawyers made fun of in American lawyer jokes from the Internet. The list of their features could have been continued without end. Not surprisingly, for all these negative traits lawyers should be exterminated. The place where lawyers go after they die is Hell.

The figure of a lawyer most frequently appears in jokes together with the figure of his eternal rival, a doctor. Besides doctors, lawyers in jokes are frequently accompanied by priests, accountants, and engineers. There are many other professions and occupations subjected to mockery in American lawyer jokes: e.g. scientists, architects, physicists, waiters, etc. And in many of such texts although a lawyer is the least positive figure but he is also the one who generally outwits representatives of other professions, according to the folk wisdom, *Smart guy wins*.

The representatives of the two most prestigious careers in America (the law and the medicine) are very often shown fighting with each other, and the lawyer generally outwits the doctor. There are a number of jokes that help illustrate how folk differentiate the lawyer's stereotype from one of the doctor. These texts, on the one hand, show fairly consistent features such as the innocence, decency, simple-mind, honesty, gullibility, naiveté, and even stupidity of doctors and, on the other hand, calculation, manipulation, dishonesty, untrustworthiness, and cunning of lawyers. Contrarily to a few texts in which both the professions of a lawyer and doctor are equally treated (usually badly), in the overwhelming majority of our texts, however, qualities of lawyers are much more unflattering than those of doctors. When compared, doctors in the

jokes, on one hand, generally have more sympathies than lawyers. On the other hand, we can't admire lawyer's inventiveness and smartness.

Many more jokes involving lawyers together with representatives of other professions and occupations (e.g. whores, politicians, mathematicians, economists, housewives, policemen, garbage collectors, janitors, barbers, and many others) could be discussed and exemplified here. Each of them could be also supported by dozens – if not hundreds – of jokes, but we have to draw the line here.

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