The following review appeared in the January 2016 issue of CHOICE:

**Psychology**


Though practical jokes may not be funny, Marsh (Indiana Univ., Bloomington) examines them in the context of verbal jokes and humor theory in general, in so doing advancing understanding of the nature of both practical jokes and humor more broadly. Presenting many examples with the skill of a folklorist, the author clarifies humor theory and aspects of practical joking such as aggression and superiority; incongruity, resolved and unresolved; play; and combinations such as “benign violation.” She discusses practical jokes from whoopee cushions and dribble glasses to elaborate pranks, such as automobiles “parked” on supposedly inaccessible roofs of buildings, revealing in all similar social patterns. Marsh describes the jokes from many points of view: the trickster, the target, and, of course, the audience. She observes that the best practical jokes take advantage of some annoying idiosyncrasy of the target, yet the joke often brings the trickster and the target closer together. This bonding is the rationale for group hazing and initiation. As this analysis reveals, the success of the target in “taking it” creates a balance of aggression and affiliation and ultimately results in a joking relationship. This is a valuable resource for anyone interested in humor and human nature.

--P. L. Derks, College of William and Mary

Summing Up: Highly recommended. Lower-division undergraduates through faculty; general readers.