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The gender divide in humor: How people rate the competence, influence, and funniness of men and women by the jokes they tell and how they tell them

Christina Rozek
crozek@wellesley.edu

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The gender divide in humor:
How people rate the competence, influence, and funniness of
men and women by the jokes they tell and how they tell them

Christina Grace Rozek

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the
Prerequisite for Honors in
Cognitive & Linguistic Sciences

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Cartoon 1. Pugh (n.d.).

Chapter 1

The gender divide in humor: What it is, why it exists, and whether or not it has narrowed

Introduction

Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, many people still doubt that women are funny. However, the notorious gender divide in humor—of men who tell jokes and of women who are expected to laugh at them (Kotthoff, 2006)—may have diminished because of women’s changing social roles in recent years. But why has a divide of this type been so prevalent in the first place? According to Deborah Tannen, men and women use language to achieve different goals, which is consistent with the ways in which men and women use humor differently. Tannen’s claim that men use conversation to increase their social status goes hand-in-hand with researchers’ findings that they use negative humor. Meanwhile, women’s use of conversation to establish closeness with others is in accordance with findings that they often use positive humor and that they prefer sharing humorous anecdotes rather than producing jokes. Therefore, men may use humor to “one-up” or demean others, while women may use humor as a means of mutual support.

Humor researcher Regina Barreca identified one of the central issues at hand when she wrote (Gilbert, 2004), “It is the inability of the critical tradition to deal with comedy by women rather than the inability of women to produce comedy that accounts for the absence of critical material on the subject” (p. 27). I will argue that women’s lack of female role models in comedy, their speaking styles, their traditional gender roles, and

their humor preferences may have contributed to this divide and that recent changes may contribute to its narrowing.

Though there are many varieties of humor, I will focus on jokes because of their connection with stand up comedy, which for many years has been a male domain. One reason for the lack of female comics in the past is that women had few or no other female comedians to emulate, making it difficult to enter the industry. However, now that there are many more women in comedy than in prior decades (Gilbert, 2004), the gender gap between men who produce humor and women who appreciate humor may be narrowing.

The lack of female comic role models may have contributed to women being viewed as less funny, but women's speech style also may have contributed to this perception. Certain speech styles, such as powerful and powerless language, in the past were strongly associated with gender (Lakoff, 1975). Some claimed that women's language was powerless while men's language was powerful. Power in language was found, however, to be dependent upon the social status of interlocutors and was thus associated with women because of their lower social status in comparison to that of men (Wiley & Eskilson, 1985).

Recent changes in gender roles may have also decreased the gender divide in humor. Social roles for women in the past often made it inappropriate to engage in most humor because it would violate norms of feminine behavior (Myers et al., 1997), a trend which I suggest is changing. Because women increasingly hold more positions of power in society, they will most likely use more powerful language. Therefore, I expect that women's shift in speech style will affect how women's humor is perceived. Compared to the past, when women were perceived as less funny or were kept out of the role of the

comic because of humor's association with dominance and superiority (Gilbert, 2004), I predict that women will now be perceived as more funny.

Finally, women may not have been seen as funny in the past because they produced and appreciated different styles of humor than men. For example, women's humor is strongly correlated with positive humor, while men's humor is correlated with negative humor (Holmes, 2006; Martin et al., 2003; Smith-Lovin & Robinson, 2001). The production of positive humor is associated with many desirable characteristics, such as effective leadership abilities, competence, and influence. Therefore, if social shifts have caused women to be seen as funnier, they may also be seen as more competent and influential.

I begin my discussion of the gender divide in humor with an overview of theories of humor, since one common type of theory, superiority theories, helps us understand male humor preference for certain humor styles, such as negative humor. I will then describe the differences between negative and positive humor styles, one of the primary gender divides identified in humor research. By connecting the gender divide between positive and negative humor with another divide—that of powerful and powerless speech—I identify a socially motivated explanation for how gender connects language and humor. To investigate possible causes of the gender divide, I will not only discuss social theories, but also evolutionary theories for gender differences in humor. To illustrate the gender divide, I will look at how men and women use humor differently in the workplace, and how gender norms affect the perception of workplace humor. Because I am interested in how women's changing social roles over time may have affected perceptions of women's humor production, I will discuss studies of apparent time—a

common sociolinguistic technique used to assess language change overtime using speakers of different ages.

Theories of humor

One can use and appreciate humor very well without analyzing why it is effective—in fact, you may say that by analyzing it, you take all the fun out of it. Nonetheless, philosophers, psychologists, and comedians have proposed many theories of humor, the three major categories of which are: Superiority, incongruity, and release (Oring, 2010). Superiority theories of humor identify the feeling of superiority as an important factor in funniness. These theories focus on how the depiction of others as foolish, incompetent, or unattractive makes the perceiver of the humor feel superior to them. Some of the most common types of humor that demonstrate superiority are put-downs and sexual or aggressive humor (McGhee, 1979). Superiority theories of humor are also often closely related to a negative humor style, used to demean or belittle others. The negative humor style is typically used to assert dominance over others, thus showing superiority.

There is some controversy, however, as to whether or not sexual humor is inherently negative or expresses superiority over others. Sigmund Freud is a classic proponent of the theory that sexual humor is negative. According to (Oring, 2010), Freud's book *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* suggests that humor is an outlet for aggressive and sexual motives and expresses superiority and malice toward others. Freud writes, "Under the mask of humor, our society allows infinite aggressions" and that "in the culminating laugh by the listener or observer...the teller of the joke betrays his hidden hostility and signals his victory" (p. 16).

In contrast to Freud, McGhee (1979) claims that most studies of sexual humor have focused only on humor in which men are the producers, while women are the objects of sexual, and often sexist, viewpoints. Though the separation of sexual and sexist humor suggests that sexual humor may not be inherently aggressive or negative, Oring (2010), meanwhile, claims that sexual humor is often made negative by inhibiting social conditions.

Because of the sexist basis of much sexual and aggressive humor and its connection to superiority theories, it is often associated with male dominance over women. Male humor, however, does not have a monopoly on sexual humor and superiority. Kotthoff (2006) describes how women's humor has a long history of addressing sexual and sexist topics, as seen in her example of a skit performed by the well-known German stand up comedian, Maren Kroymann. The skit features a man asking a woman an inappropriately personal sexual question in a workplace setting. Instead of accepting his attempt to display superiority, the woman turns the joke around on him, ultimately making him feel sexually embarrassed and exposed while asserting her superiority. Therefore, as seen in this interaction, some sexual humor is used to display superiority and is not exclusively used by men.

While Kotthoff (2006) provides an example of women's humor addressing sexual and sexist topics in relation to men, Bing (2007) explores the use of sexual humor in all-female groups. She addresses the common assumption that respectable women do not use sexual humor. Bing (2007) suggests that women use and appreciate sexual humor in all-female groups at least as much as men do, but have been taught not to use it publicly. Sexual jokes are often used by men as a way of testing a women's sexual availability,

thus, Bing (2007) claims that women's feigned lack of understanding of sexual humor is a way of rejecting unwanted male advances. Consequently, women's frequent use of sexual humor often remains an all-female activity, increasing the misperception that women do not practice and appreciate many forms of humor, including sexual ones. Therefore, sexual jokes may be tied to superiority theories of humor because of their use as a test of women's sexual availability.

In addition to the superiority theories of humor, McGhee (1979) proposes that incongruity is a central cause of humor. Indeed, Oring (2010) goes so far as to claim that "humor cannot be appreciated without the perception of an underlying appropriate incongruity" (p. 12). Incongruity humor occurs when an element of a story or situation is established as unexpected, exaggerated, or inappropriate and is then resolved. McGhee (1979) separates incongruity humor into two parts: Discovery of the incongruity and its resolution. In agreement with McGhee (1979), Dean & Allen (2000) state that the two essential elements of a joke are the set-up, which includes the minimum amount of information to establish an initial assumption, and the punch line, a reinterpretation that reverses the initial assumption.¹ Polimeni & Reiss (2006) discuss Veatch's theory that incongruities in humor must contain one "socially normal" element and one element that violates the "subjective moral order," or as Veatch defines it, the "rich cognitive and emotional system of opinions about the proper order of the social and natural world" (p. 350). Consider the following joke used as an example by Dean & Allen (2000): "For Father's Day I took my father out – permanently. I couldn't stand the way he said Mass" (p. 62). In accordance with Dean's view, the first phrase of the joke sets up an

¹ The resolution of an incongruity has also been closely tied to the reward of solving an intellectual challenge (McGhee, 1979).

assumption of what the joke will be about, and the assumption is quickly overturned by the punch line, “permanently,” while the last sentence of the joke acts as a second punch line. This joke affirms Veatch’s view, in that the punch line violates the subjective moral order.

Both superiority and incongruity are essential aspects of humor, but theorists consider relief or release to be another potential explanation for humor’s effects. Attardo (2009), a proponent of incongruity theories of humor, states that the release or relief of an incongruity is an essential ingredient in humor perception, thereby providing support for the last of the three major types of humor theories described here. In release or relief theories, humor acts as a means of releasing excess emotion or arousal (Hurley et al., 2011). Freud (as cited by Hurley et al., 2011) theorized that jokes were a method of overcoming the censorship of certain taboo thoughts and that humor was the release of the repressed energies they caused.

In order to make sense of multiple theories of humor, Davis (1993) argues that, although superiority, incongruity, and release theories of humor are typically separated, they all perform nuanced and necessary functions in the still-mysterious mechanism responsible for humor. Davis (1993) suggests that an individual perceives an incongruity that causes a sense of tension, releases this tension by finding the incongruity humorous, and feels superiority by overcoming the tension caused by the incongruity. Though incongruity theories currently have the most support, the three major types of humor theories discussed here are interwoven and may all play some role in humor appreciation. However, for the current study, superiority theories of humor are most relevant when I consider the connection of men to negative humor and women to positive humor, and

later, the more subtle connection of men to powerful speech styles and women to powerless ones.

Negative and positive humor

The gender divide in humor may be due to the fact that women use humor differently than men. The differences between types of male and female humor may have, consequently, caused women's humor to be overlooked in the past. For instance, Crawford & Gressley (as cited by Holmes, 2006) found that men used formulaic joke telling more frequently than women and that women preferred the use of anecdotes and stories more than men preferred to use them. However, the primary difference noted between women and men's humor is that of positive versus negative humor. I will discuss studies that have found strong associations between men and women's humor and negative and positive humor and will address possible explanations for discrepancies in the otherwise strong correlation of gender and humor styles.

To investigate negative and positive humor styles, Martin et al. (2003) developed the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) to assess four primary humor styles: Self-enhancing, affiliative, self-defeating, and aggressive, and related each style to positive or negative humor. Self-enhancing humor serves to enhance self-esteem in a positive way, much like affiliative humor helps positively promote interpersonal relationships. Self-defeating humor enhances interpersonal relationships at the expense of the self, and aggressive humor enhances the self at the expense of another. Martin et al. (2003) found affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles to be positive and aggressive and self-defeating humor styles to be negative.

One of the styles identified as positive, affiliative humor, is characterized by playfully joking with others, making witty statements, telling amusing stories, and laughing. It is strongly correlated with positive traits, such as extraversion, openness to experience, cheerfulness, high self-esteem, psychological well-being, and social intimacy. Affiliative humor is negatively correlated with traits of bad mood, anxiety, depression, and seriousness.

Another positive style, self-enhancing humor, includes the tendency to adopt the perspective of others, to have a humorous outlook on life, to use humor as a coping mechanism, and to engage in humor while not in the presence of others. Similar to affiliative humor, self-enhancing humor is positively correlated with desirable traits, such as extraversion, openness, cheerfulness, high self-esteem, optimism, psychological well-being, and satisfaction with one's social support. Self-enhancing humor is negatively correlated with neuroticism, bad mood, anxiety, and depression.

Aggressive humor, a negative style, often occurs in the form of sarcasm or teasing and as a method of criticizing or manipulating others. It often includes compulsive displays of humor with little regard for others. Aggressive humor is positively correlated with neuroticism, hostility, and aggression and is negatively correlated with agreeableness and seriousness.

Martin et al. (2003) also note that the negative style of self-defeating humor places the joke tellers at the mercy of the audience, making him or her the "butt of the joke" (p. 54). Self-defeating humor is positively correlated with depression, anxiety, hostility, aggression, bad mood, and psychological issues, while it is negatively

correlated with high self-esteem, psychological well-being, intimacy, and satisfaction with social support.

In an earlier study of negative and positive humor styles in task-oriented group discussions, Smith-Lovin & Robinson (2001) found similar patterns of positive and negative humor use as those later identified by Martin et al. (2003). Smith-Lovin & Robinson (2001) observed that positive humor was used to build cohesion, while negative humor was used to differentiate social status among individuals, to destroy interpersonal bonds, and to show veiled aggression.

Women's use of humor to build cohesion fits with Deborah Tannen's (1990) description of rapport and report talk. Rapport talk is associated with women's speech, and focuses on establishing connections and shared experiences (Tannen, 1990). Report talk is most commonly associated with men's speech styles, and is based on maintaining independence and status within groups. While rapport talk emphasizes displaying empathy for others, report talk emphasizes showing dominance through displaying one's knowledge and skills (Tannen, 1990).

According to Tannen (1990), men's language is reflective of the way in which they generally engage with the world, that is: "As an individual in a hierarchical social order in which he was either one-up or one-down" (p. 24). Tannen (1990) says that men use conversations as opportunities to increase their own social status and decrease that of others. Thus, their desire to dominate is not only found during interactions with women, but also with other men. Tannen (1990) claims that women approach the world quite differently: "As an individual in a network of connections" (p. 25). Tannen (1990) argues that this way of engaging with the world is a function of the way male and female

children play, which is largely with other children of the same gender and, thus, they participate in separate cultures from an early age. Therefore, we can see that there are similar patterns associated with men and women's speech in both positive and negative humor and in rapport and report styles.

Tannen (1990) claims that men's use of conversation to increase their social status goes hand-in-hand with researchers' findings that they often use negative humor. Meanwhile, women's use of conversation to establish closeness with others is in accord with findings that they often use positive humor and that they prefer sharing humorous anecdotes rather than producing jokes.

In a study of self-reported humor use, Myers et al. (1997) present additional examples of gender differences in positive and negative humor. Participants answered questions designed to assess whether their humor could be classified as *positive affect*, a situational coping mechanism; *expressiveness*, a demonstration of likes and dislikes; or *negative affect*, a display of belittling others. They found that men were significantly more likely to use humor to express negative affect while no significant difference was found between men and women in their use of humor for expressiveness or to show positive affect.

Further evidence is presented by Holmes (2006), who notes the findings of studies indicating that negative humor styles are more typical of male humor. Men more frequently tell hostile and formulaic jokes (Crawford & Gressley; as cited by Holmes, 2006), prefer aggressive and sexual styles of humor (Marlow; as cited by Holmes, 2006), and are more competitive than women in their joke telling (Hay and Jenkins; both as cited by Holmes, 2006). Research also suggests that women's humor is more cooperative

than men's humor (Ervin-Tripp & Lampert and Hay; both as cited by Holmes, 2006) and is more often jointly constructed (Jenkins; as cited by Holmes, 2006).

Though there is some variation among definitions of negative and positive humor, the findings of Martin et al. (2003), Smith-Lovin & Robinson (2001), Myers et al. (1997), and others are generally in agreement about the characteristics of negative and positive humor. These studies show a strong association of negative humor with men's humor and of positive humor with women's humor. Indeed, aggressive humor was negatively correlated to feminine traits in Martin et al.'s (2003) study, and one of its central characteristics was "unmitigated masculinity" (p. 71). Though many studies on the connection between gender and humor present a strong case for the correlation of men's humor with negative humor and of women's humor with positive humor, certain inconsistencies have been found in the association of women with positive humor that suggest the operation of other factors.

Inconsistencies in the gender divide

Martin et al.'s (2003) findings suggest a correlation of positive and negative humor with female and male humor, yet, they also report an unexpected finding, which is the positive correlation of self-enhancing humor with masculine traits and its negative correlation with feminine traits. These findings suggest that there are further complexities that must be investigated when relating gender and humor styles. Before discussing how factors such as women's social status, traditional gender roles, and speech styles may have influenced women's humor styles, I will look at whether these findings regarding the relation of women's humor and positive humor are present in other research.

Myers et al. (1997) report findings from Palmer and Walker & Dresner which show that men's humor is typically aggressive, hostile, and competitive—an expected result connecting men's humor and negative humor. However, they also report that women's humor is usually ironic and self-deprecating, which is not expected because these characteristics are not typical of positive humor.

Given the findings of multiple studies on the connection between gender and different types of humor, it is clear that women's humor is correlated with aspects of positive humor and men's humor is correlated with aspects of negative humor. However, the findings that feminine traits are negatively associated with self-enhancing humor and positively correlated with irony and self-deprecation indicate that other factors, such as traditional gender roles and speech styles may contribute to gender's effect on humor. Indeed, the influence of gender on humor is part of a much larger debate regarding how gender affects speech style. In order to understand this debate, it will be necessary to consider the meaning of the term "gender" as well as to discuss both evolutionary and social theories of how gender differences in language and humor may have arisen.

Explanations for the gender divide in humor: Evolutionary and social

The terms "sex," "gender," "female," "male," "woman," and "man" are distinct and carry different social and biological implications. "Sex" refers to the genetic and biological differences between males and females, whereas gender refers to the social, cultural, and psychological display of characteristics that may or may not be grounded in an individual's biological sex (Wood, 1998). In *What's the difference?*, Wood (1998)

states a current view of the specific characteristics belonging to the domain of gender versus sex:

Actual sex differences are limited to primary and secondary sex characteristics and resulting sex characteristics and capabilities. Biological qualities (the province of sex) are less important than the meanings that society attributes to them and the distinctive roles, opportunities, experiences, and constraints that society assumes are and should be linked with each biological sex (the province of gender) (p. 30).

Therefore, both evolutionary theories (based mostly on sex) and sociocultural theories (based more on gender) have been developed to account for the gender divide in humor.

Evolutionary explanations for the gender divide

In terms of evolutionary approaches, Greengross & Miller (2011) suggest that humor is used in the selection of a mate because it is a marker of intelligence. Greengross & Miller (2011) offer a possible explanation from an evolutionary standpoint for the gender divide in humor, saying that males typically compete to mate with females, while females choose their mate from among multiple competitors. Therefore, according to Greengross & Miller (2011), the pressures for men to be humorous have been stronger over time, and have, consequently, caused humor to be a more pronounced trait in men. In an essay by Christopher Hitchens entitled “Why Women Aren’t Funny” (2007), he echoes the claims of Greengross & Miller (2011) by arguing that women may be able to appreciate humor, but are not as good at producing it as men are because, evolutionarily, they do not need to be.

If Greengross & Miller (2011) and Hitchens (2007) are correct that the evolutionary pressures for men to be funny are much stronger than they are for women, then the gender divide in humor should be found cross-culturally. Indeed, in a cross-

cultural study of humor in married couples in the U.S., U.K., China, Turkey, and Russia, Weisfeld et al. (2011) showed that in four of the five countries, husbands were perceived as making wives laugh more often than wives made husbands laugh. This was not the case, however, in Russia, where wives were perceived as funnier. This finding would suggest the possibility of a social explanation for the gender divide, one supported by writer Alessandra Stanley in her response to Hitchens' evolutionary claim in her essay, "Who Says Women Aren't Funny?" (2008). Stanley argues that, even if women may not evolutionarily need humor as much as men do to find a mate, this has not made them any less funny. Rather, she argues, the expectation that men need to be funnier has merely caused women to be punished for displaying humor.

The findings of Weisfeld et al. (2011)—that the gender divide in humor varies cross-culturally—do not exclude a biological basis for differences in humor production, and may, in fact, be explainable by evolutionary mechanisms. If, as has been claimed, it is actually more difficult for women in Russia to find suitable mates, women would be forced to compete more for available men, which would put them under greater pressure to produce humor as a method of attraction. Nonetheless, in the United States, women have recently been more and more recognized for their humor, and it is less clear that this development is associated with their experiencing a greater difficulty in finding suitable mates than in the past, so it seems reasonable to consider some social explanations for the phenomenon.

Social explanations for the gender divide

Here I take a sociolinguistic approach to the question of what factors have contributed to the gender divide in humor, one of which may be the difference in men and women's use of powerful language. There is no inherent characteristic of a set of letters or words that endows them with power. Rather, all power of language is attained through the attribution of cultural beliefs that certain characteristics carry social value (Ridgeway, 1991). As we have seen, negative and positive humor styles are strongly related to dominance in traditional gender roles. Along these same lines, speech styles—and in particular, differences in the use of powerful language—have also been associated with gender. Women may be viewed as less funny than men if they use more markers of powerless speech.

Powerful and powerless speech styles are a crucial component in understanding how the gender divide in humor is connected to how men and women's speech styles have been perceived overtime. In fact, the very separation of *women's language* from simply *language*, places the former at a disadvantage by making it the marked form, that is, by distinguishing it from typical language usage. When men's language is called *language*, it is the unmarked form, meaning that it is viewed as the default or standard usage and the most fundamental and unaltered form (Thorne & Henley, 1975). The unmarked form, here seen as men's speech, is more frequently used, is indicative of membership in the in-group, and displays higher social prestige (Myers-Scotton, 1997).

In Robin Lakoff's (1975) book, *Language and Woman's Place*, she proposes that socially reinforced differences in how men and women are supposed to speak are not only reflective of, but also a cause of fundamental gender inequalities. Lakoff (1975)

claims that the characteristics most associated with women's language are, in fact, those of powerless language. Lakoff's (1975) characterization of women's language, which she claims to be synonymous with powerless language, contains hedges ("well" and "maybe"), tag questions ("isn't it?," "don't I?," and "wasn't he?"), fillers ("well," "you know"), female-specific lexical items and empty adjectives ("adorable," "charming," "sweet," "lovely," and "divine"), higher frequency of polite or hyper-polite forms ("please," "will you?" and "won't you?"), more frequent use of intensifiers ("so"), less frequent use of taboo and swear words, and more frequent use of standard language forms. In addition to these lexical features, it also includes some prosodic features, such as avoidance of interruptions and rising intonation.

As mentioned above, Lakoff (1975) suggests that the correlation of women's speech and powerless speech is both a cause and a reflection of women's lower social status. In Bucholtz's revised edition of *Language and women's place*, she identifies four theories commonly used to describe gender differences in language: Deficit, dominance, difference, and discourse (Lakoff, 2004). Bucholtz argues that Lakoff's (2004) characterization of women's language and powerless language is an example of the deficit theory of gender differences in language. In the deficit theory, gender differences in language demonstrate a way in which one group (women, in this case) is deficient in some way compared to another group (men) (Lakoff, 2004). For example, Lakoff (2004) proposed that women should use fewer forms of women's language in favor of adopting an androgynous speech style. Bucholtz also identifies Lakoff's (2004) theories of women's language as fitting within the dominance model, which describes gender differences in terms of a powerful versus powerless group. Bucholtz describes the

difference theory, which views gender differences in language as reflective of a distinctive cultural group that is not lacking (deficit model) or inferior (dominance model)—a theory often associated with Tannen’s work. Finally, the discourse model presents gendered language as a mechanism for performing gender within a cultural context and not as a natural endowment of any gender group (Lakoff, 2004).

For the purposes of our discussion of how gender roles in language have influenced women’s humor, I will focus on the dominance theory. Lakoff (2004) claims that men focus more than women on the show of dominance in language, and that, in fact, women may actively display a lack of dominance through their speech style. Therefore, women’s acceptance of a lack of dominance may be one possible explanation for the negative correlation of feminine traits and self-enhancing humor (Martin et al., 2003) as well as the positive correlation with irony and self-deprecation (Palmer and Walker & Dresner; both as cited by Myers et al., 1997).

In contrast to Lakoff (2004), Wiley & Eskilson (1985) and Erickson et al. (1978) found that powerless speech is not used only by women, but by the interlocutor who holds less power in a given interaction, and it is this view that is now supported by most researchers. Recent research has offered further revisions to the claims of Lakoff (2004) and Erickson et al. (1978), suggesting that features of powerless language are not only common among those who hold less power in an interaction, but are also found in younger age groups and in those who are more socially aware (Laserna et al., 2014). A sociocultural view of language difference emphasizes that it is not who you are, but what position in the social hierarchy you hold that influences whether you use powerful or powerless speech. Therefore, because women have historically held less power than men

and have been of lower social status, they have often been associated with the use of powerless speech.

Women's humor as marginalized humor

Men's propensity to display dominant behavior in order to gain social status may give them an advantage in verbal humor, which places the comic at the center of attention and is often an exercise in dominance (Smith-Lovin & Robinson, 2001; McCann et al., 2010; Dunbar et al., 2012). This type of humor has traditionally been considered a masculine domain, partially because its practitioners violate social norms in order to reinforce their social status and power (Kotthoff, 2002). In fact, women may have developed more positive uses of humor as a coping mechanism against unfavorable social conditions caused by their position as members of an historically less powerful group than men. Gilbert (2004) and others have suggested that humor serves as a way of protecting oneself by creating distance between the self and harmful events or stressors. Gilbert (2004) argues that humor performed by socially marginalized groups, such as women, empowers through subversion of the dominant culture.

As research has shown, styles of speech and humor are clearly associated with certain groups, such as those of men and women. However, to understand gender differences in humor, it is also important to consider how linguistic norms are established in groups known as communities of practice.

Communities of practice

The association of women with positive humor and less powerful speech styles and of men with negative humor and more powerful speech styles may have arisen because men and women have traditionally been members of different communities of practice, such as those found in the workplace.

The community of practice is a relatively new term that was first described by Lave & Wenger and later refined by Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (both as cited by Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999). A community of practice (CofP) is a group that shares terminology and linguistic norms and is engaged in a mutual endeavor (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999). To form a community of practice, a collection of individuals must have the same mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire, all of which facilitate the development of shared beliefs and practices that are reflected in the group's use of language. Mutual engagement means that the members of a group interact with each other on a regular basis, such as in a family setting, at the office, a classroom, or on a sports team. Joint enterprise among group members occurs when working toward a common goal and sharing accountability for its outcome. Shared repertoire, meanwhile, is the collection of terminology and linguistic routines used within the group. CofPs reflect both the level of social organization that occurs in day-to-day contexts and the habits and experiences of individuals and the larger group (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999).

Becoming a member of a CofP is a learning process in which one's ability to display knowledge of the common practices of the group is central to acceptance. Members are often peripheral at first and become more central as they practice the shared repertoire. Some CofPs display linguistic habits and use terminology that is markedly distinct from

practices of the wider community, while others employ only subtle linguistic differences. CofPs also vary by the degree to which their practices influence and are adopted by the wider community (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999).

A community of practice, a more recent concept, is distinct from a speech community, though they share the common goal of connecting linguistic and social structures, and consist of a group of individuals with a shared set of social and linguistic norms (Labov, 1972). In speech communities, however, members *externally identify* with a shared set of social norms, whereas in CofPs, members *actively practice* these norms, meaning that their membership is internally constructed within the group. Members of a CofP must also share a set of goals, which is not a necessary component of a speech community (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999).

The concept of the community of practice marks an important development in gender research by improving upon the model of the speech community previously used in investigations of the connection between gender and language. The model of the speech community was used primarily to focus on differences in language patterns caused by early socialization into socially constructed gender roles. The theories of speech communities explained how certain social structures affect linguistic norms, yet offered few details on how these norms came about. The theory of communities of practice, however, focuses on how gender is constructed *through* social practices—a more procedural method than the outcome-focused speech community model. CofPs are intended to reflect how complex aspects of identity and language are actively used by people to establish the shared beliefs of their group and, thus, are a crucial component for linking language and society (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999).

Gender and humor in the workplace

The workplace is an ideal setting to observe the linguistic habits of communities of practice and to see how certain kinds of humor can create more productive working environments and increase leadership effectiveness. In a study of interaction in a New Zealand workplace, Holmes (2006) found men's humor to be negative and less effective, while women's humor was positive and more effective. Holmes (2006) also found that women's humor created collaborative and successful group discussions in which participants used "supportive conjoint humor" to elaborate on and strengthen others' contributions while working toward a shared goal (p. 41). Meanwhile, men's humor created less collaborative and less effective working environments. Though these findings do not directly contradict the claim that women are less funny than men, they do provide evidence that women's humor exhibits positive characteristics and can be more effective in group settings. In another study, Smith-Lovin & Robinson (2001) found that humor used by women in six-person groups was more frequently cohesion building, whereas, men's humor in the group was more frequently differentiating. Because of their effective use of positive group humor, one might expect that women would generally be perceived as funnier than men. Women have, nonetheless, often been considered less funny than men.

The use of positive humor in the workplace not only enhances group discussions, but may also contribute to leadership effectiveness. Decker & Rotondo (2001) selected a random sample of business school alumni to complete a questionnaire concerning their managers' perceived level of humor enjoyment, leadership behaviors, and leadership effectiveness. Their findings indicate that the use of negative humor worsened the

manager's task and relationship behaviors and that the use of positive humor resulted in improved task and relationship behaviors. Most interesting was the finding that female managers were given lower task and relationship behavior ratings than male managers when both used negative humor, but female managers were rated higher than their male counterparts when both used positive humor. Thus, although it may be less socially acceptable for women to use negative humor in the workplace, women may gain a significant advantage over their male counterparts by using positive humor at work.

Why women's humor is not always positive

As discussed earlier, the findings of several studies show that perception of women's humor may be greatly influenced by gender roles. In fact, social pressure for women to adhere to these gender roles helps to explain the surprising results of several studies. Decker and Rotondo's (2001) finding that, though women were more effective than men while using positive humor in the workplace, they were less effective when using negative humor, may reflect different social expectations of women. Women's social norms may also explain why Martin et al. (2003) found a negative correlation of feminine traits with self-enhancing humor. Women may be less associated with self-enhancing humor because of socially reinforced gender roles requiring women to be more humble than men. Myers et al. (1997) also reported findings of Palmer and Walker & Dresner that women's humor is usually ironic and self-deprecating, which is not surprising when viewed in relation to traditional gender roles. Though women's humor is still correlated with positive humor styles, the findings of these researchers show that social gender roles are also an important factor in shaping women's humor.

Apparent and real time studies

I have explored several ways in which language use and humor style may vary as a function of gender, and have argued that some traditional patterns may now be changing so as to reduce the gender divide in humor. How could such change be captured? One method of studying short-term language change would be to record the linguistic habits of many speakers over the course of their lifetimes, a method used in what are referred to as real time studies. Though they can provide an accurate reflection of shifts in linguistic habits, the changes observed in real time studies sometimes do not accurately represent changes in the speech style of a community because of variations in interview methodology, sampling procedure, and community demographics (King & Schilling-Estes, 2008). Studies of real time also require a significant time investment on the part of participants and researchers. Therefore, a more frequently used method for studying shifts in linguistic habits in sociolinguistic contexts is that of “apparent time.” Apparent time studies look at speakers in different age groups in order to gain insight into the linguistic norms of the past. These studies rely on research that shows that older speakers tend to use forms of language that they adopted during their teenaged years, whereas, younger speakers tend to use newer, more innovative forms (Holmes, 1992). They also rely on the assumption that, by comparing the speech of older and younger participants, one can infer changes in language over time. Some, however, have argued that apparent time studies are not entirely reliable indicators of language change. Studies of apparent time are based on the assumption that individuals’ linguistic habits remain stable after adulthood, which cannot always be assumed because of a phenomenon called “age grading” (Van Herk, 2012). Age grading occurs because sociolinguistic norms vary

according to age, often requiring that older adults change the way they speak in order to reflect their social status and experience (Eckert, 1997). Therefore, studies of apparent time may not accurately capture changing linguistic habits, because there are often ways of speaking that are particular to different age groups. Although neither real time studies nor apparent time studies offer a completely accurate reflection of language change in progress, their results do offer some valuable indications of change. I have chosen to use the method of apparent time in the current study because it is significantly more practical to execute than a study of real time change and because researchers have found clear evidence for linguistic habits and attitudes that have changed over time by observing groups of speakers of different generations in studies of apparent time.

Summary and conclusion

So far we have looked at differences between men and women's language and humor styles and assessed some possible causes—both biological and social—for how they may have arisen. Though there is a fairly clear dividing line between men and negative humor styles and women and positive humor styles, the discrepancies found by some researchers indicate another factor may be at work: Women's traditional gender roles shape how women's humor is perceived. However, the traditional gender roles and speech styles that have contributed to the gender divide in humor are changing. As we have seen, the correlation of women's speech styles with positive humor styles, shown to be beneficial in group settings—such as workplaces—and in leadership effectiveness, seems to suggest that women would be much more successful in their use of humor than men. The perception of women's humor, however, historically has been quite the

opposite. According to Crawford & Gressley (as cited by Holmes, 2006), there has, in fact, been a “social construction of women as a deviant and deficient group with neither the wit to create humor nor the ‘sense of humor’ to appreciate it” (p. 219). Therefore, I plan to investigate whether women’s changing social roles and linguistic styles have narrowed the gender divide in humor.

Chapter 2

An investigation of the effects of powerful and powerless speech styles on speaker attributes

Introduction

As discussed in the first chapter, many people believe that women produce and appreciate humor less and tell jokes less frequently than men (Crawford & Gressley, 1991; Mickes et al., 2011). The popular view that women are not as funny is especially troubling because humor appears to be a marker of competence and intelligence (Greengross & Miller, 2011; Parton et al., 2002). Humor is an effective tool to establish and increase one's power in a social situation and is important for achieving status in the workplace (Decker & Rotondo, 2001). Now that women are publicly engaging in and performing humor more than ever before, the way that women's humor may be perceived by both men and women and whether that perception has changed over time are of particular interest to studies of language, gender, and humor. The goal of the current study is to investigate how gender bias and aspects of language that are linked to gender affect perception of women's humor.

Who are the funnier joke tellers: Men or women?

Out of the many types of humor, one of the most obvious and widely recognized is joke telling—a famous staple of stand up comedy routines. For many years stand up comedy and joke telling were almost exclusively male activities. However, the women's rights movement has highlighted the absence of women in many realms, and some progress has been made since the 1960s in increasing their numbers in a range of roles,

including the role of stand up comedian (Collier & Beckett, 1980; Walker, 1985). In fact, the growing number of women who publicly engage in humor has done a great deal to counteract and change the view that women are not humorous. Because women often perform humor that addresses topics pertaining to other women (Hay, 2000), the increase in female comics has caused a shift in what is considered funny and in what it means to be a funny person (Collier & Beckett, 1980). However, despite the progress made by women, men are still found in the role of stand up comedian much more frequently than women and it is likely that they are still perceived as funnier.

Hypothesis 1

When the same joke is attributed to either men or women, participants will rate male joke tellers as more competent, influential, and funny than female joke tellers.

Hedging, tag questions, and hesitations: Features of powerless speech

As was noted in chapter 1, verbal humor in the form of joke telling places the comic at the center of attention and is often an exercise in dominance (Dunbar et al., 2012; McCann et al., 2010; Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001). This type of humor has traditionally been considered a masculine domain, partially because its practitioners violate social norms in order to reinforce their social status and power (Kotthoff, 2002). Because women are less frequently associated with dominant characteristics than men are, it is expected that women's role in producing humor historically has been overlooked. Furthermore, since verbal power is strongly associated with joke telling, both

women and men may be viewed as less funny if they use more markers of powerless speech—speech that has been linked to women, but not exclusively (Holtgraves & Lasky, 1999).

As noted in chapter 1, the linguistic style famously described by Lakoff (1975) as women’s language, has been characterized by a cluster of certain linguistic features, including hedges, tag questions, hesitations, fillers, rising intonation, intensifiers, empty adjectives, increased use of standard language forms, super-polite forms, avoidance of profanities, and avoidance of interruptions (Van Herk, 2012). Since many of these same features have been found in the speech of men in less powerful positions, it has also been called powerless speech (Blankenship & Craig, 2007; Hosman & Siltanen, 2011; Lind et al., 1978). For the purposes of this study, I will focus on hedges, hesitations, and tag questions as markers of powerless speech because they are common and natural-sounding features of powerless speech that can plausibly be incorporated into transcripts of spoken jokes.

Hedging is the use of “deliberately vague” language (Clemen, 1997) to soften a statement, making it less direct and assertive (Nordquist, n.d.). Examples of hedging are: “I think,” “kind of,” and “I suppose” (Nordquist, n.d.). Tag questions are single words or short phrases in the form of a question attached to the end of a statement, such as “right?” and “don’t you think?” (Blankenship & Craig, 2007). Hesitations are brief pauses in speech, denoted by “...” that often express uncertainty (Hosman, 1997).

Hypothesis 2

Male and female joke tellers whose jokes include hedges, tag questions, and hesitations will receive lower ratings for competence, funniness, and influence.

The uses of powerless speech: The influence of women's speech on men

In a study by Carli (1990), participants listened to recordings of identical persuasive messages spoken by either men or women and then gave a rating on an 11-point scale intended to measure how much the participants were influenced by the speaker. Results showed that female speakers who spoke tentatively were more influential with male participants, whereas, female speakers who spoke assertively were more influential with female speakers. This study suggests one way in which the gender of the speaker affects his or her social influence, and it is in agreement with Parton et al.'s (2002) study, in which participants listened to mock job interviews that had been manipulated by speech style, interviewer gender, and interviewee gender. Participants rated the interviewees' dynamism, social attractiveness, competence, and employability on a Likert-type scale. Results showed that female interviewees who used a powerless speech style received higher ratings of social attractiveness from both male and female respondents than female interviewees using a powerful speech style. Because we asked our participants to evaluate our speakers' influence but not social attractiveness, we made a prediction that female hedging would affect men's responses differently from those of women.

Hypothesis 3

Female joke-tellers whose jokes contain hedges, tag questions, and hesitations will receive higher influence ratings—and possibly higher competency and funniness—from male participants than from female participants (Carli, 1990; Parton et al., 2002).

Has the perception of powerless speech changed?

As noted above, powerless language is used by less powerful interlocutors who, in the past, were likely to be women. However, as women gain powerful positions in society, their association with powerless speech may decrease. In an analysis of courtroom speech styles, Lind et al. (1978) provide evidence for the separation of powerless language from women's language, since male witnesses used powerless language features in addressing female judges. Analysis of the speech styles used in testimony showed that women in positions of power, such as expert witnesses, use powerful language, indicating that powerful and powerless speech styles are not directly tied to gender.

Lind et al.'s (1978) findings, when taken in conjunction with the growing numbers of women in powerful positions, would suggest a change in women's use of powerless speech styles. There is evidence, however, that women's use of powerless speech forms may not have decreased substantially. The results of a study by Leaper & Robnett (2011) suggest that the distribution of tentative speech among men and women has remained largely the same since Lakoff's (1975) studies of tentative speech in the 1970s. Though the distribution of tentative speech may not have changed over time, there could have

been changes to the way in which tentative speech is evaluated as increasing numbers of women are in the workforce. For instance, younger people may have become desensitized to powerless speech, causing them to be more accepting of it and more apt to use it than older groups (Holtgraves & Lasky, 1999; Laserna et al., 2014).

As discussed in the first chapter, one way to look for evidence of possible change in attitudes towards the use of powerless speech is to compare the ratings of various attributes, such as influence, competence, and funniness, of the joke teller given by participants of older and younger age groups. When this approach is used in sociolinguistic research, it is described as showing change in apparent time by demonstrating differences in older and younger generations of speakers. As mentioned previously, apparent time studies are based on the assumption that linguistic habits learned early in life remain relatively stable and that comparing the responses of older and younger participants can thus suggest change over time (Boberg, 2004). Greater exposure to women's tentative style of speech in situations where they have established a powerful role, such as in the workplace, may have reduced its association with powerlessness, especially for younger participants (Collier & Beckett, 1980). Therefore, we predict that older participants will give higher ratings of competence, funniness, and influence to joke tellers whose jokes do not contain hedges, tag questions, and hesitations because older participants' responses reflect views established in the past when powerless speech may have been deemed less acceptable.

Hypothesis 4

Older participants will give higher competence, funniness, and influence ratings than younger participants to joke tellers whose jokes do not contain hedges, tag questions, and hesitations.

Experimental design

The goal of the current experiment is to investigate how the age and gender of participants will affect the ratings they give for attributes of competence, funniness, and influence of male and female joke tellers. Its aim is to provide evidence for how gender bias and aspects of language that are linked to gender affect perception of women's humor.

The study measures how male and female (between subjects variable 1 = gender) participants of both older and younger age groups (between subjects variable 2 = age) rate joke tellers based on three attributes contained in the jokes. Participants will be exposed to jokes that vary by whether hedges, tag questions, and hesitations (within subjects variable 1 = hedging) are used, by the gender of the speaker (within subjects variable 2 = speaker gender), and by whether each joke is presented first or second when presented in pairs (within subjects variable 3 = instances).

Participants

The experiment included 163 participants, 16 of whom were excluded in the final analysis because they were not members of the desired demographic group or because they took insufficient time to complete the survey (<4 minutes). Results of 147

participants were considered in the final analysis (36 younger female, 38 younger male, 38 older female, and 35 older male). The range of ages in the younger group was 18-27 years and in the older group was 51-60. Although all participants were speakers of English, eleven participants were not born in the U.S and did not consider themselves American. Six were born in India and five were born in other countries.

Materials and procedure

Although preference for negative and positive humor, as described in chapter 1, is part of the source of the gender divide in humor, in order to avoid jokes with offensive content—such as the sexism or racism found in many negative jokes—no such jokes were included and no comparison was made between strictly positive and strictly negative jokes. Eight jokes were chosen for the experiment. Each one was 75-200 words in length and did not contain offensive content. All jokes were taken from *Laugh Lab* (Wiseman, 2002) and *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters* (Cohen, 1999). All jokes conformed to the criteria previously described by Dean (2000); they established an initial assumption, the set-up, then reinterpreted the assumption by means of a punch line. One hedge or tag question was included in the text of the joke per 25 words. Therefore, short 75-word jokes contain only three tag questions or hedges, whereas 200-word jokes contain eight. Every joke that contained hedges and tag questions also included four hesitations, represented as “...” within the text of the joke. In order to maintain the appearance that the stimuli were transcriptions, jokes without hedges and tag questions also included two hesitations. Hedges, tag questions, and hesitations were not

inserted into dialog within the jokes because that could cause the misattribution of the powerless markers to the characters in the joke, rather than to the joke teller.

All eight jokes were used in all four versions of the surveys and were presented both with hedges, tag questions, and hesitations (hedged condition) and without them (unhedged condition). In each of the four versions of the survey jokes appeared either as hedged or unhedged and were attributed to either a male or a female speaker. (See Appendix I for a list of all jokes in both hedged and unhedged versions as well as the distribution of the jokes to each version of the survey). Each participant provided scores for every type of joke (male unhedged, female hedged, etc.), meaning that members of each group heard the same version of each joke, and the joke they heard in each category was the same as other members of their group, but was different from the jokes heard by other groups for that same category.

The survey, including a consent form, was distributed on the Amazon website Mechanical Turk. Mechanical Turk uses crowd sourcing, in which participants are paid to perform Human Intelligence Tasks (HITs). The results of Mechanical Turk surveys have been compared to those conducted in traditional university research settings and no significant differences have been found between the two methods (Buhrmester et al., 2011).

Participants were first asked to complete a written, electronic consent form. The form included a brief explanation of the purpose and procedures of the study. Participants were informed that there were no risks associated with participation in the study and that their results would remain anonymous. They had the option of withdrawing from the study at any time.

Participants were asked to answer a set of demographic questions (See Appendix II for a complete copy of the survey instrument, including the demographic questionnaire).

Once the consent form was signed, participants received instructions for completing the survey. They were told that they would be reading transcriptions of jokes told by students in a public speaking course at a university and that they would be evaluating each student on the measures of funniness, influence, and competence. The text emphasized that the instructor of the course was most interested in the style in which each student told the jokes, and not with which jokes they told.

Participants were then presented with transcripts of the eight jokes on separate pages. Each joke was followed by a series of Likert scales from 1-7 for funniness of the joke as well as funniness, competence, and influence of the joke teller. Participants were also asked whether they had heard each joke before. Questions asking participants to recall minor details were asked after jokes three and seven to ensure that participants were paying attention to the joke transcriptions. Results of those who answered both attention questions incorrectly were not included in the analysis.

After completion of the joke section of the survey, participants answered a series of questions on language and national identity, including whether they were born in the U.S., how long they had lived in the U.S., what other languages they spoke, and whether they identified as American.

Participants were asked to name their favorite male and favorite female comedians. They also completed self-ratings for funniness, competence, and influence. Finally, they were asked for their thoughts on the survey and given a debriefing.

Design

The design included two between-group variables (age and gender) and 4 within-group variables (speaker gender, hedging, question type, and instances). The results were analyzed using a multivariate analysis (MANOVA) to correct for sphericity. A Bonferroni correction was used with post hoc tests to correct for the multiple comparisons.

Results

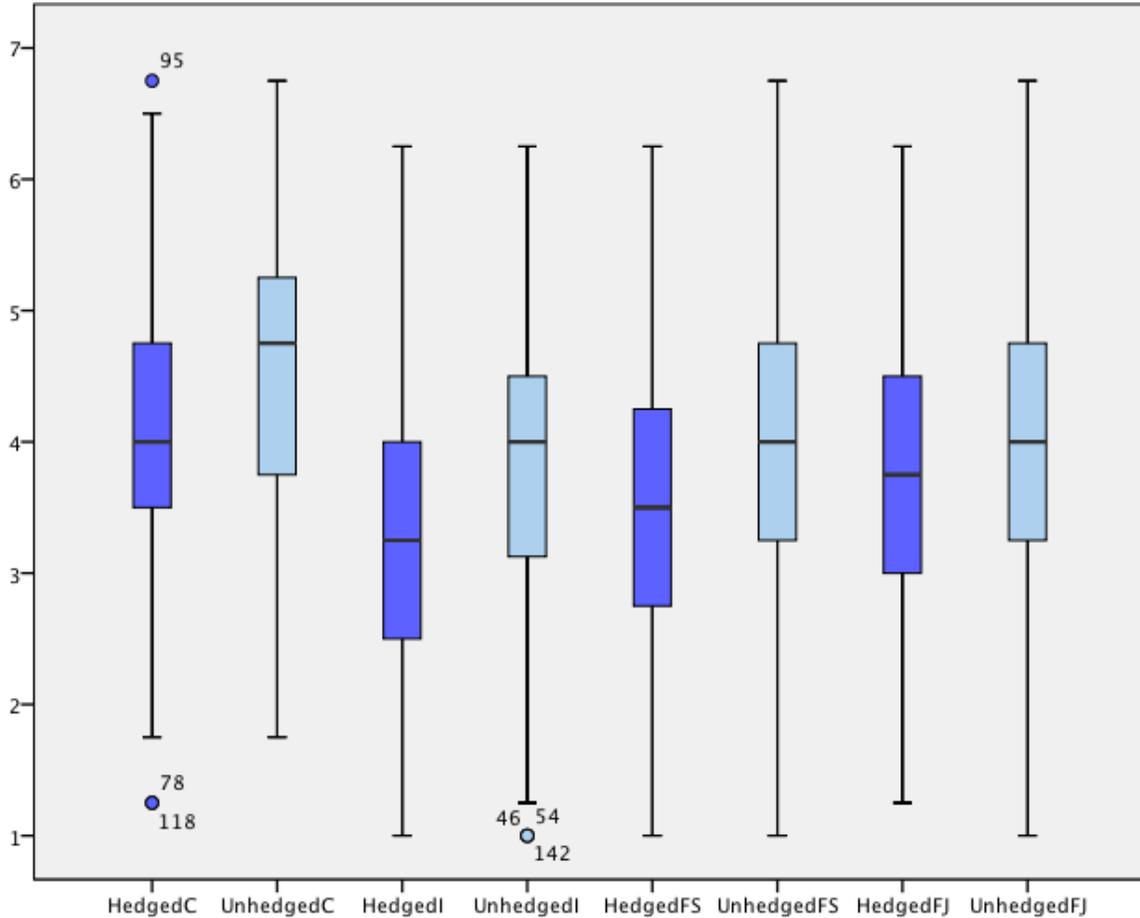
There was a significant effect of hedging, $F(1, 142) = 21.30, p < .001$. Mean ratings of hedged jokes were significantly lower ($M = 3.65, SD = .084$) than those given to unhedged jokes ($M = 4.06, SD = .079$).

There was a significant main effect of question type $F(3, 142) = 32.27, p < .001$, demonstrating that participants consistently rated joke tellers differently on the four question types of competence ($M = 4.27, SD = .077$); influence ($M = 3.55, SD = .086$); funniness of speaker, which showed the most significant difference, ($M = 3.75, SD = .075$); and funniness of joke ($M = 3.86, SD = .075$). Post hoc comparisons showed that each question type was significantly different from every other. Influence received significantly different ratings compared to competence, funniness of speaker, and funniness of joke, and competence was rated significantly differently than funniness of speaker and funniness of joke, all at $p < .001$. Funniness of speaker was also significantly different than funniness of joke at $p < .021$. These results suggest that participants separately considered each of the four questions asked about speakers, though they gave

speakers more similar ratings for funniness of speaker and funniness of joke than they did for other question types.

A third significant main effect of instances $F(1, 142) = 27.37, p < .001$ was found, showing that instance 1 jokes were rated consistently lower ($M = 3.67, SD = .070$) than instance 2 jokes ($M = 4.04, SD = .083$). This finding will be explored in detail below.

Two significant two-way interactions were found. One two-way interaction was question type x hedging, $F(3, 140) = 2.88, p < .05$. Below is a simple box plot of these results, below which is Table 1, with the means. As can be seen in the figure and the table, there is a greater difference in the effect of hedging on influence judgments than on judgments made about the other questions.

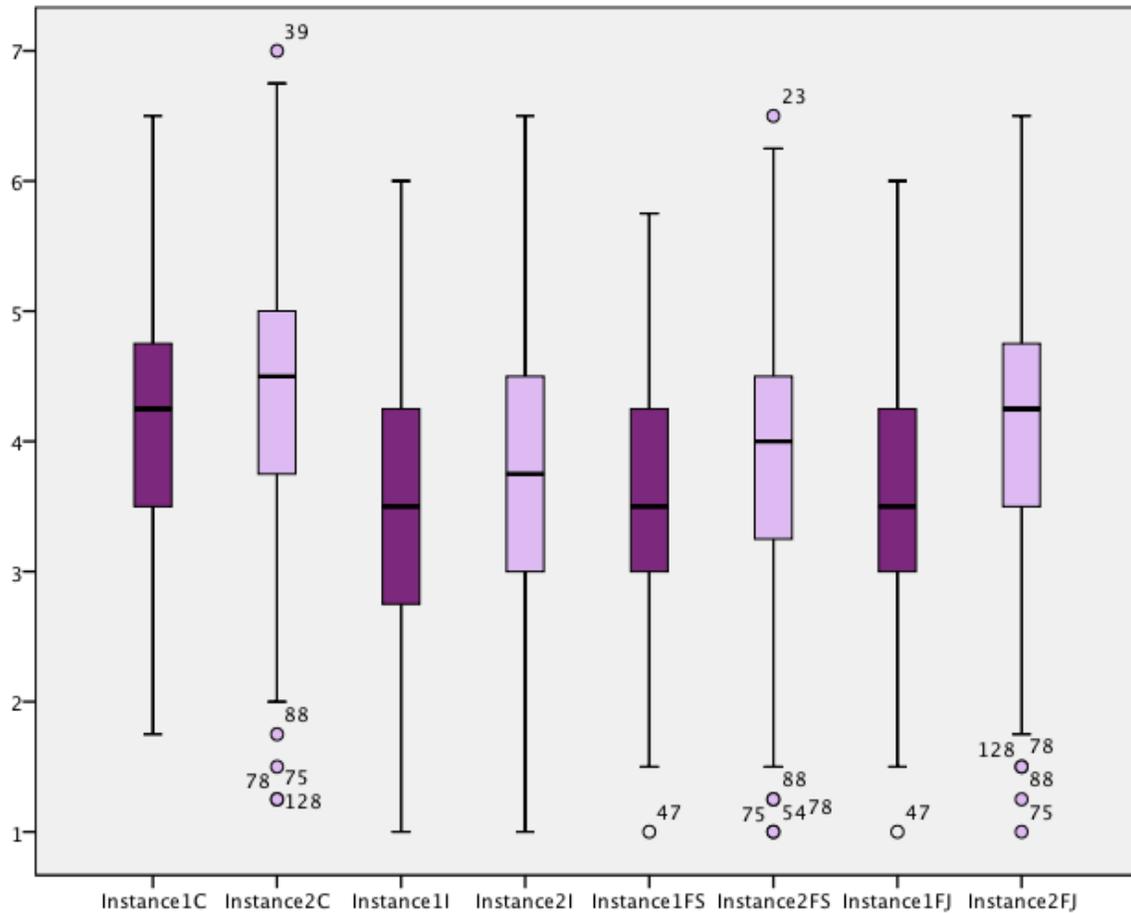


Box plot 1. Median scores for interaction of question type x hedging. Each colored box represents the interquartile range—the range for 50% of scores. The dividing line of each box represents the median score, in this case, of all participants on ratings given in response to different question types for hedged vs. unhedged jokes. The upper and lower whiskers represent the ranges of the upper and lower quartiles. Points beyond the upper and lower whiskers are outliers, and the numbers that accompany them represent individual participant scores.

	Competence	Influence	Funniness of speaker	Funniness of joke
Hedged	4.05	3.29	3.53	3.73
Unhedged	4.49	3.80	3.96	4.00

Table 1. Mean scores for interaction of question type x hedging.

Another two-way interaction was question type x instances, $F(3, 140) = 4.99$, $p < .01$. Participants rated joke-tellers significantly differently according to question type while also consistently giving higher ratings to instance 2 jokes than to instance 1 jokes (see Box plot 2 and Table 2).

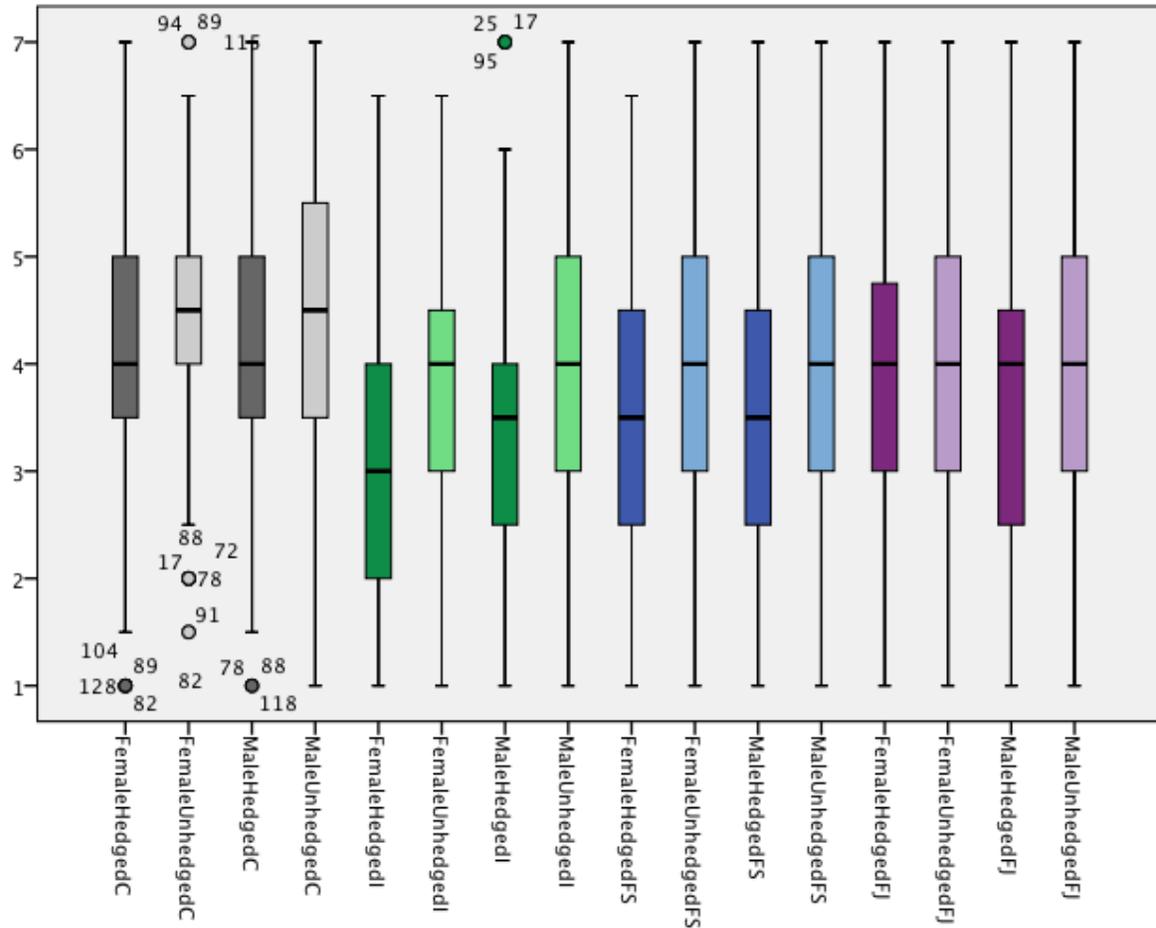


Box plot 2. Median scores for two-way interaction of question type x instances. Please see the caption for Box plot 1 for a detailed description of simple box plots.

	Competence	Influence	Funniness of speaker	Funniness of joke
Instance 1	4.08	3.42	3.57	3.62
Instance 2	4.46	3.68	3.92	4.11

Table 2. Mean scores for the interaction of question type x instances.

One three-way interaction was also found consisting of question type x hedging x speaker gender, $F(3, 140) = 3.89, p < .01$. In terms of hypothesis 3, it is worth noting that participants rated women higher than men when their jokes were hedged (see Table 3). It is also clear from the box plot (see Box Plot 3) that there is much more dispersion above the median for female-hedged speech for the influence question than for the other three types (see Box plot 3). This seems to show a pattern somewhat similar to that of Carli (1990) with respect to her influence question, although there was no difference between male and female participants. Parton et al. (2002), on the other hand, found a similar pattern of women being judged as more socially attractive using powerless speech and less socially attractive using powerful speech. In the latter case, both male and female participants made similar judgments. The support for the findings above in the current experiment was partial: Women were less penalized for hedging than men, but women were not more penalized for using powerful, unhedged speech.



Box plot 3. Median scores for three-way interaction of question type x hedging x speaker gender. Please see the caption for Box plot 1 for a detailed description of simple box plots.

	Speaker	Competence	Influence	Funniness of speaker	Funniness of joke
Hedged	Female	4.08	3.36	3.57	3.70
	Male	4.02	3.27	3.48	3.77
Unhedged	Female	4.49	3.79	3.99	4.09
	Male	4.49	3.82	3.94	4.00

Table 3. Mean scores for 3-way interaction of question type x hedging x speaker gender.

One significant 4-way and one significant 5-way interaction were also found, but will not be discussed here because of difficulty of interpreting complex interactions such as these.

Explanation of the instance effect

The third main effect described above was that of instances. Although the jokes were presented in randomized order to each participant, instance 1 jokes were always presented before instance 2 jokes. The main effects of instances $F(1, 142) = 27.37, p < .001$ was highly significant, showing that instance 1 jokes were rated consistently lower ($M = 3.67, SD = .070$) than instance 2 jokes ($M = 4.04, SD = .083$). The significant effect of instances does not relate to predictions made in the hypotheses.

Because all subjects saw each pair of jokes in the same order, it was possible that some quality of the second member of the pair was responsible for the effect. One possible explanation was that the average length of instance 1 and instance 2 jokes was substantially different. However, the average length of instance 1 jokes was 125.9 words and for instance 2 jokes was 115.75 words. These results indicate the word length is not a likely explanation for the significant effect of instances.

Another possible explanation for the significant main effect of instances is that participants may have been more familiar with instance 1 than instance 2 jokes. I examined this possible explanation through an analysis of participants' responses to whether they had heard each joke before. An average of 25.5 participants were already familiar with instance 1 jokes (for 121.5 participants they were unfamiliar). For instance 2 jokes, an average of 20 participants had heard the jokes before, while 127 had not.

Though the results show a slight discrepancy in participants' familiarity with instance 1 and instance 2 jokes, it does not provide a sufficient explanation for the significance of instances.

Our final possible explanation was that there was a significant difference of the overall funniness of instance 1 vs. instance 2 jokes. In order to investigate this possibility, another MANOVA was conducted, in which the factors of hedging and speaker gender were ignored (since they differed for each joke and for each of its versions in the four surveys), but the jokes factor was included in the analysis. The between subject factors were age and gender and the within subject factors were joke and question type. The main effect of jokes was highly significant, $F(7, 137) = 24.00, p < .001$, as was the main effect of question type, $F(3, 141) = 31.05, p < .001$. The analysis also revealed a significant interaction of jokes and participant age, $F(7, 137) = 3.24, p < .003$, and of jokes and question type, $F(21, 123) = 4.93, p < .001$.

The post hoc analysis for funniness of jokes revealed that there was no significant difference in the funniness of the first pair of jokes (jokes 1 and 2), $p < 1.00$. There was a significant difference for jokes 3 and 4, $p < .001$. However, it was in the opposite direction than predicted in order to support overall funniness as a possible explanation. Jokes 5 and 6 showed a significant difference, $p < .001$, and joke pair 7 and 8 showed the same significant difference $p < .001$. Since two out of the four pairs showed a difference in the direction of instance 2 jokes being funnier than instance 1 jokes, the difference between overall funniness of instance 1 and instance 2 jokes remains a possible explanation for the significant effect of instances, though it is not strongly supported.

Additional data

Participants were asked if they had heard each joke before, and results show that some jokes were much better known than others. As indicated above, the well-known jokes, however, do not correspond to the pattern of instance 1 versus instance 2 jokes. The bear joke was by far the most widely known; 74 of 147 participants had heard it prior to the study. The hell joke was second most recognized, with 37 participants familiar with it. Fewer numbers of participants had heard the remainder of the jokes before, and the least well known of them was the cold joke, which had been heard by only 6 participants prior to the study.

Participants were also asked to name their favorite male and female comedians. Overall female participants had slightly more responses to the favorite male comedian question (18 did not respond) than to the favorite female comedian question (23 did not respond). Male respondents, on the other hand, had far more responses to the favorite male comedian question (14 did not respond) than to the favorite female comedian question (38 did not respond). This suggests that male participants may have less familiarity with female comedians, while female participants showed an almost equal or slight preference for male comedians over female comedians.

Louis C.K. was the clear winner among younger male and female participants (7 votes from young women and 7 from young men), whereas Robin Williams was by far the favorite comedian of female older participants (6 votes), but was surprisingly less popular among older male participants (2 votes). This discrepancy may be due to the fact that older male participants' preferences were distributed very evenly among many comedians. In a very even distribution of preference, two votes were given to each of the

following comedians by older male participants: Bill Hicks, Brian Regan, Chris Rock, George Carlin, Louis C.K., Robin Williams, Conan O’Brian, and Jerry Seinfeld. These results suggest that older women, younger women, and younger men each had stronger group preferences for favorite comedians (see Fig. 1).

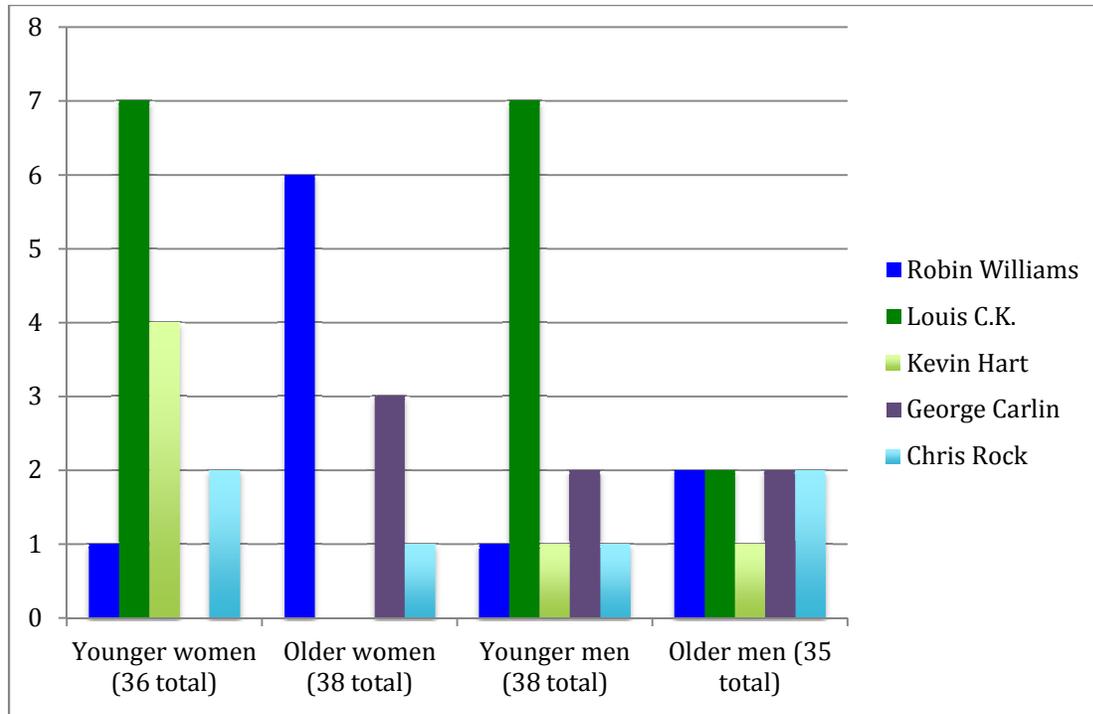


Fig. 1. Preferences for male comedians.

Sarah Silverman (8), Ellen DeGeneres (12), and Joan Rivers (9) were the most popular female comedians among the four groups. An interesting pattern arose in older women’s comedian preferences. This group strongly preferred Ellen DeGeneres (6) and Joan Rivers (4) and cast few votes for other comedians. I find this result surprising because Ellen DeGeneres has a very positive and gentle humor style, while Joan Rivers was known for her aggressive and, often negative, style. Therefore, the popularity of

these two comedians among older women could be a function of how, for older generations, there were many more male and fewer female comedians (see Fig. 2).

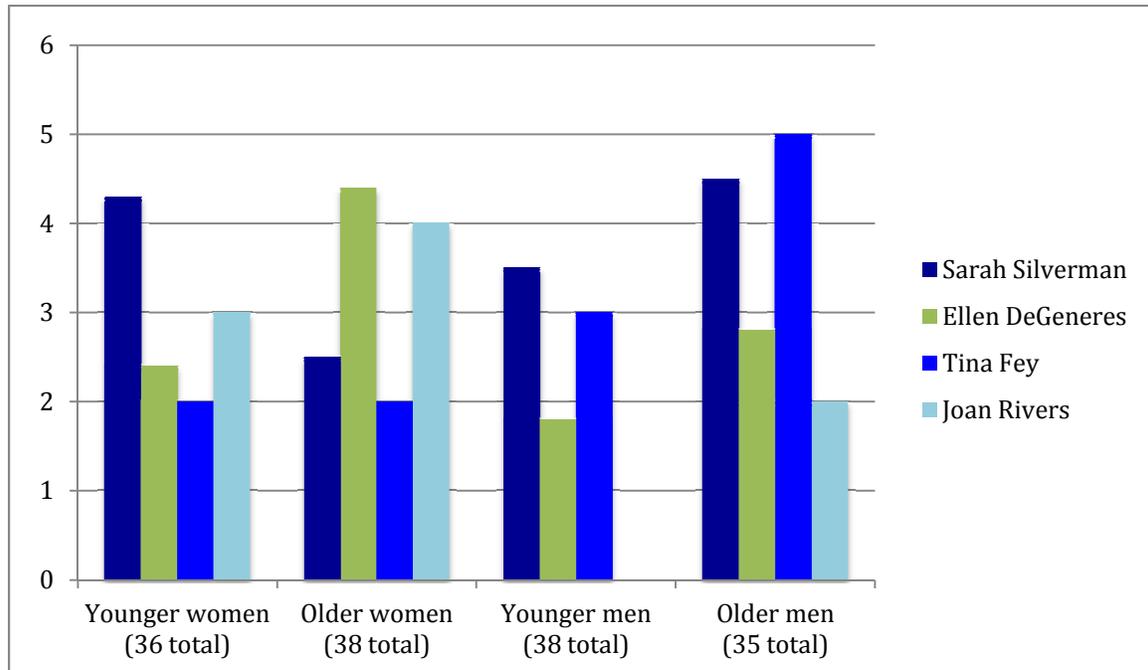


Fig. 2. Preferences for female comedians.

The most notable result from both older and younger male participants on the comedian preference question was the lack of responses for favorite female comedian. Only 16 older male respondents were able to name a favorite female comedian, while 19 left the question blank. Similarly, only half of younger male participants were able to name a favorite female comedian (19 named one, 19 did not). These findings suggest that women may participate more in both male and female comedy, while men participate primarily in male comedy only or perhaps simply prefer male comedians to female ones.

Participants were also asked to give self-ratings for funniness, competence, and influence. Men gave higher overall self-ratings than women on funniness and influence,

and gave the same average self-rating on competence, the trait on which both men and women rated themselves most highly (see the figure below for details).

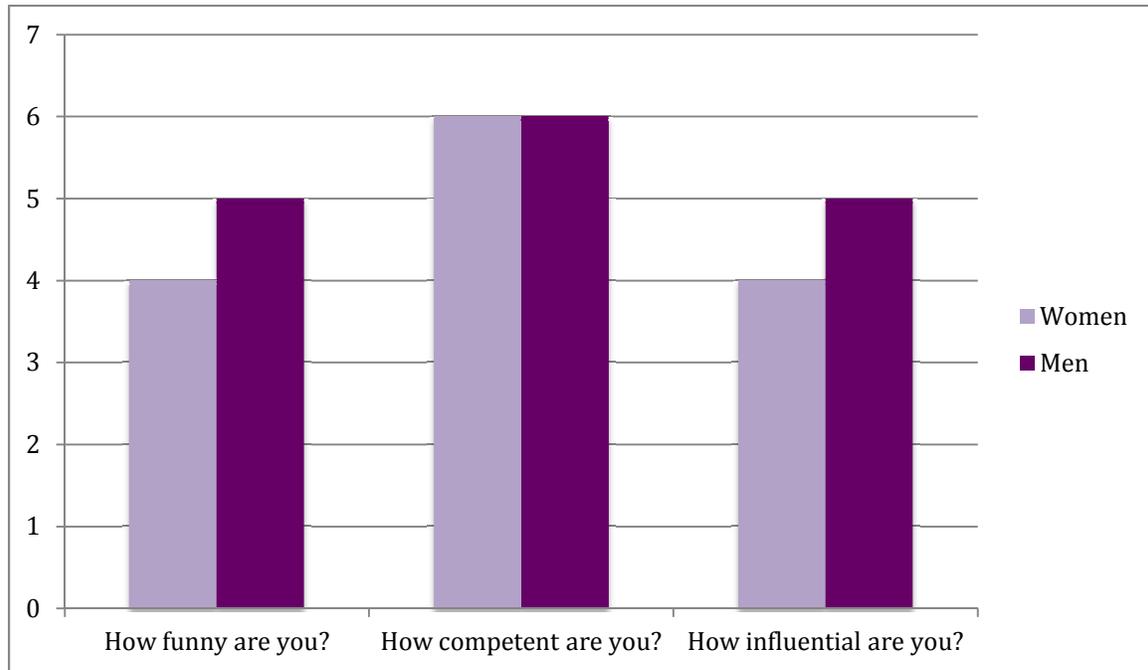


Fig. 3. Mean self-ratings for men and women of funniness, competence, and influence.

After reading each joke, participants were asked to rate how funny each joke was. Ratings were comparable among all eight jokes, with only a slight, average preference for some jokes over others (see the figure below for details).

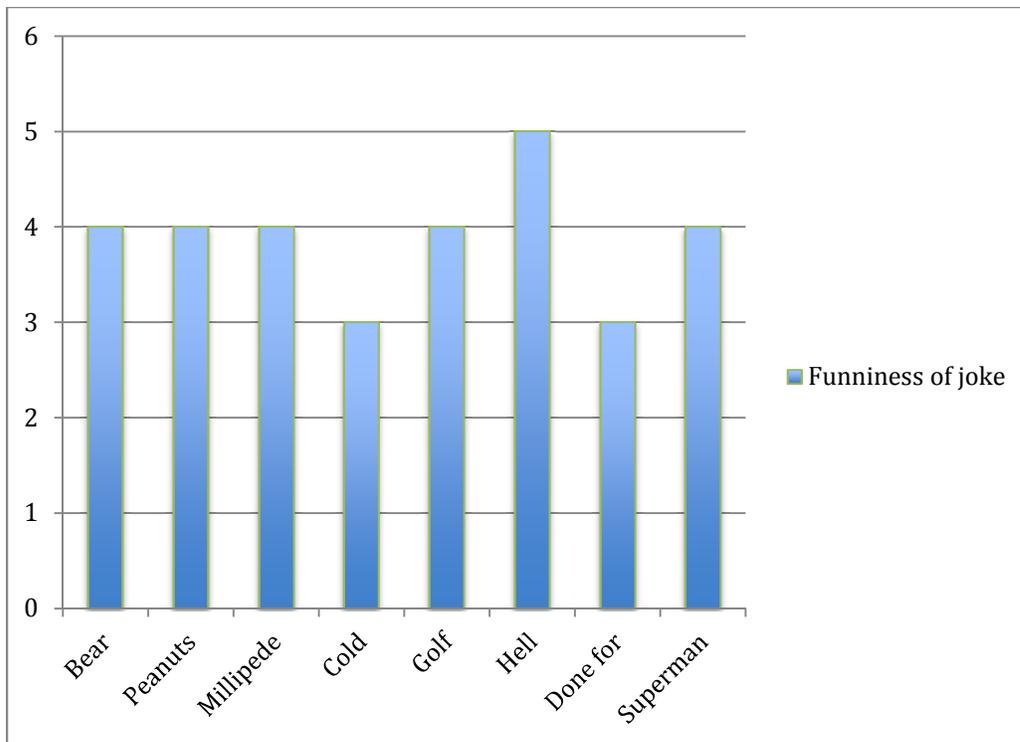


Fig. 4. Mean ratings of male and female participants for funniness of jokes.

Participants were asked what they thought of the study and provided commentary in open response boxes. Participants most frequently commented on what they guessed the researchers aimed to learn from the survey. The majority of participants commented positively on their experience taking the survey, often saying that it was interesting, enjoyable, and different from other studies in which they had participated.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to investigate the effect of powerless language styles—in particular those of hedging and tag questions—on how men and women are evaluated for funniness, competence, and influence when they tell jokes, in order to see if there is a link between power in language and the question of why men have historically been perceived as funnier than women.

Because men have often been labeled as funnier than women, I predicted that, when the same joke is attributed to either men or women, participants would rate male joke tellers as more competent, influential, and funny than female joke tellers (Hypothesis 1). Results did not confirm Hypothesis 1, in that no significantly different ratings of funniness, competence, and influence were detected between male and female joke tellers. It is unreasonable to assume that these results indicate that there is no longer a disparity between perceptions of men and women's humor. Instead, the results most likely reflect features of the experimental design that interacted in an unexpected manner. For example, though each question about the speaker was labeled with either a clear male or female first name and one or two male or female pronouns, participants still may not have paid particular attention to speaker gender.

The other main prediction of this study was that male and female joke tellers who employ a powerless speech style, one that includes hedges, tag questions, and hesitations, would receive lower ratings for competence, funniness, and influence from older and younger participants as well as from both men and women (Hypothesis 2). The results strongly support this prediction. There was a highly significant main effect of hedged versus unhedged, with hedged jokes rated significantly lower than unhedged jokes. There was also a significant main effect of question type, with all types significantly different from each other. Participants tended to rate speakers highest on competence, followed by funniness and lowest on influence. Given also that ratings on the question of influence appeared most affected by hedging, these finding suggests that powerless speech markers have a detrimental effect on perception of positive speaker attributes, and that some attributes, such as influence, are more affected than others.

While the prediction in Hypothesis 2 addressed the effect of hedged speech on all speakers, Hypothesis 3 predicted how joke teller gender would affect the influence of powerless language on ratings of speaker attributes. Hypothesis 3 stated that female joke tellers whose jokes contain powerless speech elements would receive higher influence ratings and might also receive higher competency and funniness ratings, though those latter two predictions were not based, as was the prediction with respect to influence, on previous studies (Carli, 1990; Parton et al., 2002). There was a significant three-way interaction among question type, hedged versus unhedged speech, and male versus female speaker. As noted above, the ratings for females on the influence question were lower than those for the men in the unhedged condition but higher than those for the men in the hedged condition. This pattern was not found for the other speaker attributes. These patterns provide support for the findings of Carli (1990) that female speakers using powerless speech styles were more influential with male participants than female speakers using powerful speech styles were.

Hypothesis 4 was based on the idea that, as more women enter the workforce and retain a powerless style of speaking, the powerless style would become more familiar to their co-workers and perhaps less devalued. Thus, the hypothesis stated that older participants would give lower competence, funniness, and influence ratings than younger participants to joke tellers whose jokes contain hedges, tag questions, and hesitations. The results do not support this hypothesis. As in the case of Hypothesis 1, this finding should not be considered an indication that older and younger participants are affected equally by powerless speech styles used by joke tellers. It is due perhaps instead to the

comparative strength of participants' reactions to hedging and tag questions used in powerless jokes.

As mentioned previously, the significant main effect of instance and the significant two-way interaction of question type and instances suggest that instance 2 jokes were overall different in some way than instance 1 jokes. Of the several possible explanations for why instance 2 jokes were rated higher than instance one jokes, including joke length, familiarity, and funniness, joke funniness appeared to receive the most support.

Limitations of the study

Speaker gender might have been found to be a significant main effect if participants had been primed for it in the survey directions. In addition, participants might have reacted more strongly to male versus female joke tellers if the study had not been presented only in transcript form, but in voice recording. A third possible, though improbable, explanation for why greater differences between ratings attributed to male versus female joke tellers were not detected, is that too many hedges and tag questions were included in each powerless joke.

Ideas for future research

The examination of participants' favorite male and female comedians suggests a means for identifying gender and age differences in humor perception. For example, I propose a future study in which participants give competence, influence, and funniness ratings based on audio clips of current and past popular male and female comedians. In

the study, the experimental group would receive audio clips of male and female comedians, while the control group would read a transcript of the clip. The transcript would be identified as coming from the comedian who was heard in the audio clip as a way to account for identification of comedian as a significant factor that could affect ratings between the experimental and control groups. In this way, I could observe how factors such as voice quality, intonation, and hesitation affect listeners' perceptions of male and female comedians, as well as what differences emerge when the jokes are heard as opposed to read.

I would also like to explore the causes for the connection of gender to positive and negative humor styles and in what ways this pattern may be changing. To do this, I propose that positive and negative humor replace powerful and powerless speech style as a dependent variable in the previously described study's design. I will select reliably identifiable examples of positive and negative humor styles and choose audio clips of male and female comedians using positive and negative styles. I will compare participant ratings of speaker traits of male versus female comedians using positive versus negative humor. Again using the apparent time technique, I will be able to see whether there are changes in perception of positive and negative humor styles over time. I predict that women's use of negative humor will be more highly rated by younger participants than older ones and by women than men because of changing gender roles for women and greater visibility of female comedians.

Appendix I - Stimuli

Note: Hesitations are represented by "...". Hedges, tag questions, and hesitations are presented here in brackets for ease of viewing. Brackets were removed when jokes were presented in the survey.

1. Outrun a bear

Unhedged

"Two hikers were walking through the woods when they noticed that a bear was charging toward them in the distance...The first hiker removed his hiking boots and began to lace up his running shoes...The second hiker laughed and said, 'Why bother changing your boots? You can't outrun a bear!'...The first hiker replied, 'I don't have to outrun the bear...I only have to outrun you.' "

Hedged

"[Basically] two hikers were walking through the woods, [right?], when they noticed a bear [that appeared to be] charging toward them in the distance...The first hiker removed his hiking boots and [like] began to lace up his running shoes...The second hiker laughed and said, 'Why bother changing your boots? You can't outrun a bear!'...The first hiker replied, 'I don't have to outrun the bear...I only have to outrun you.' "

2. Complimentary peanuts

Unhedged

"A man walks into a bar one afternoon, sits on a stool, and asks the bartender for a beer. When the bartender brings the drink he says, 'Will you be OK out here for a few minutes? I have to do a few things in the back.' 'Sure,' says the man, 'Take your time'...Shortly after the bartender leaves for the back room, the man hears someone say, 'You're looking pretty good. Have you been working out?' 'Not very much,' says the man, as he looks around...But he can see no one. As he turns back to his beer, he hears the voice again... 'That's a nice shirt you're wearing. It goes well with your pants.' Again the man can see no one, and he is becoming uneasy. When the bartender returns from his errands, the man says to him, 'The funniest dammed thing has been going on. Someone seems to be talking to me, but I can't see anyone'...'Oh, that,' says the bartender. 'It's the peanuts. They're complimentary.'"

Hedged

"[Essentially], a man walks into a bar one afternoon, sits on a stool, and asks the bartender for a beer, [you see?] When the bartender brings the drink he says, 'Will

you be OK out here for a few minutes? I have to do a few things in the back.' 'Sure,' says the man, 'Take your time'...Shortly after the bartender leaves for the back room, the man [actually] hears someone say, 'You're looking pretty good. Have you been working out?' 'Not very much,' says the man, as he looks around...But [really] he can see no one. As he turns back to his beer, he [sort of] hears the voice again...'That's a nice shirt you're wearing. It goes well with your pants.' Again the man can see no one, and he is becoming [kind of] uneasy, [don't you think?] When the bartender returns from his errands, the man says to him, 'The funniest damned thing has been going on. Someone seems to be talking to me, but I can't see anyone'...'Oh, that,' says the bartender. 'It's the peanuts. They're complimentary.'"

3. Millipede shoes

Unhedged

"A young man lives alone and starts feeling lonely, so he goes to the pet shop to get something to keep him company. The pet shop owner suggested an unusual pet, a talking millipede...The man bought a millipede, took it home, and for lack of advance preparations, made it a temporary home in a cardboard box...That evening he leaned over the closed box and said, 'I'm going to the pub for a drink, do you want to come, too?' He waited for a few moments but there was no reply...He tried again, 'Hey, millipede, wanna come to the boozier with me?' Again, no response. He decided to give it one more try before returning the millipede to the pet shop. So he got really close to the box and repeated rather loudly, 'I SAID I'M GOING TO THE PUB FOR A DRINK. DO YOU WANNA COME?'...'I heard you the first time!' snapped the millipede, 'I'm putting my bloody shoes on!' "

Hedged

"A young man lives alone and [really] starts feeling [kind of] lonely, so he goes to the pet shop to get something to keep him company. The pet owner suggested [sort of] an unusual pet, a talking millipede, [don't you think?]...the man bought a millipede, took it home, and for lack of advance preparations, made it a temporary home in a cardboard box. That evening he leaned over the closed box and said 'I'm going to the pub for a drink, do you want to come, too?'...he waited [totally] for a few moments but there was [basically] no reply. He tried again, "Hey, millipede, wanna come to the boozier with me?"...again, no response. He decided to give it [maybe] one more try before returning the millipede to the pet shop. So he got really close to the box and repeated rather loudly, 'I SAID I'M GOING TO THE PUB FOR A DRINK. DO YOU WANNA COME?'...'I heard you the first time!' snapped the millipede, 'I'm putting my bloody shoes on...'"

4. Cold outside

Unhedged

"A man is lying asleep with his wife one night when she wakes him, saying 'Close the window; it's cold outside'...He grunts, rolls over, and goes to sleep...His wife nudges him. 'Close the window; it's cold outside.' He moans, pulls the blankets closer, and goes back to sleep. Now his wife kicks him firmly and pushes him with both hands. 'Go on. Close the window; it's cold outside'...Grumbling, he slides out of bed, shuffles to the window, and bangs down the open lower half...Glaring at his wife he says, 'So now it's warm outside?' "

Hedged

"A man is [basically] lying asleep with his wife one night when she wakes him, saying 'Close the window; it's cold outside'...He grunts, rolls over, and goes to sleep...His wife [sort of] nudges him. 'Close the window; it's cold outside.' He moans, pulls the blankets closer, and goes back to sleep...[you see?] Now his wife kicks him firmly and pushes him with both hands. 'Go on. Close the window; it's cold outside'...[Totally] grumbling, he slides out of bed, shuffles to the window, and bangs down the open lower half...Glaring at his wife he says, 'So now it's warm outside?' "

5. Golf funeral

Unhedged

"As a funeral train passes by a golf course, a golfer on one of the greens stops and stands at attention...with his hat held over his heart as the hearse goes by...Then he goes back to lining up his putt...His playing partner remarks how that was the nicest gesture he'd ever seen, to show such respect for the dead. The first golfer sinks his putt and says...'Well, she was a good wife for sixteen years.' "

Hedged

"As a funeral train passes by a golf course, a golfer on one of the greens stops and stands at attention...with his hat [essentially] held over his heart as the hearse goes by...Then he [pretty much] goes back to lining up his putt...His playing partner remarks how that was the nicest gesture he'd ever seen, to show such respect for the dead, [don't you think?] The first golfer sinks his putt and says...'Well, she was a good wife for sixteen years.' "

6. Hell husband

Unhedged

"A man left for a vacation to Jamaica. His wife was on a business trip and was planning to meet him there the next day...When he reached his hotel, he decided to send his wife a quick email. Unable to find the scrap of paper on which he had written her email address, he did his best to type it in from memory.

Unfortunately...he missed one letter, and his note was directed instead to an elderly preacher's wife whose husband had passed away only the day before...When the grieving widow checked her email, she took one look at the monitor, let out a piercing scream, and fell to the floor dead...At the sound, her family rushed into the room and saw this note on the screen:

'Dearest Wife,

Just got checked in. Everything prepared for your arrival tomorrow.

Your Loving Husband

P.S. Sure is hot down here.' "

Hedged

"A man left for a vacation to Jamaica. His wife was on a business trip and was planning to meet him there [basically] the next day...When he reached his hotel, he [pretty much] decided to send his wife a quick email. Unable to find the scrap of paper on which he had written her email address, he did his best to type it in from memory, [you see?]....unfortunately, he [sort of] missed one letter, and his note was directed instead to an elderly preacher's wife whose husband had passed away [maybe] only the day before...When the grieving widow checked her email, she took one look at the monitor, [totally] let out a piercing scream, and fell to the floor dead...At the sound, her family rushed into the room and saw this note on the screen:

'Dearest Wife,

Just got checked in. Everything prepared for your arrival tomorrow.

Your Loving Husband

P.S. Sure is hot down here.' "

7. Done for

Unhedged

"A shipwreck survivor washes up on the beach of an island and is immediately surrounded by a group of native warriors... 'I'm done for,' the man cries in despair... 'No you are not,' comes a booming voice from the heavens. 'Listen carefully, and do exactly as I say. Grab the spear from the one who is beside you and shove it through the heart of the chief'... The man does so... and the remainder of the band stare in disbelief. 'Now, what?' the man asks the heavens. 'Now, you're done for.' "

Hedged

"A [real] shipwreck survivor washes up on the beach of an island and is [almost] immediately surrounded by a group of native warriors, [you see?]. 'I'm done for,' the man cries in despair... 'No you are not,' comes a booming voice from the heavens. 'Listen carefully, and do exactly as I say. Grab the spear from the one who is beside you and shove it through the heart of the chief'... The man does so, [don't you think?]. ...and the remainder of the band [essentially] stare in disbelief. 'Now, what?' the man asks the heavens. 'Now, you're done for.' "

8. Superman

Unhedged

"A man on a business trip is staying in a high-rise hotel with a bar on the top floor. After checking in and seeing his room, he decides to go upstairs. There's only one other patron in the bar. The businessman orders a drink and then watches in surprise as the other patron quickly eats an orange, chugs his beer, and jumps out the window... A minute later, the man returns. The businessman is shocked to see him again eat an orange, chug his beer and then jump out the window... When the man returns a third time, the businessman decides he can do this too. He eats an orange, chugs his beer... then jumps out the window to his death... The bartender turns to the man and says, 'You know, Superman you're a real jerk when you're drunk.' "

Hedged

"A man on a business trip is staying in a high-rise hotel with a bar on the top floor, [you see?] After checking in and seeing his room, he [sort of] decides to go upstairs. There's [maybe] only one other patron in the bar. The businessman orders a drink and then watches in surprise as the other patron quickly eats an orange, chugs his beer, and jumps out the window... A minute later, the man returns. The businessman is [totally] shocked to see him again eat an orange, chug

his beer and then jump out the window...When the man returns a third time, the businessman decides he can do this too. He eats an orange, chugs his beer...then [actually] jumps out the window to his death...The bartender turns to the man and says, 'You know, Superman you're a real jerk when you're drunk.' “

Gender and hedging according to categorization of groups 1-4

Group 1	Bear	hedged	female
	Peanuts	hedged	male
	Millipede	unhedged	female
	Cold	unhedged	male
	Golf	hedged	female
	Hell	hedged	male
	Done for	unhedged	female
	Superman	unhedged	male
Group 2	Bear	unhedged	female
	Peanuts	unhedged	male
	Millipede	hedged	female
	Cold	hedged	male
	Golf	unhedged	female
	Hell	unhedged	male
	Done for	hedged	female
	Superman	hedged	male
Group 3	Bear	hedged	female
	Peanuts	hedged	female
	Millipede	unhedged	male
	Cold	unhedged	female
	Golf	hedged	male
	Hell	hedged	female
	Done for	unhedged	male
	Superman	unhedged	female
Group 4	Bear	unhedged	male
	Peanuts	unhedged	female
	Millipede	hedged	male
	Cold	hedged	female
	Golf	unhedged	male
	Hell	unhedged	female
	Done for	hedged	male
	Superman	hedged	female

Appendix II - Survey

Note: Blanks such as “____” in instructions and questions asked about each joke are used here to represent speaker names and pronouns that indicate speaker gender throughout the survey.

Demographics

Q1 Gender identity- Do you identify as:

- Female (1)
- Male (2)
- I prefer to identify as (3) _____
- I prefer not to answer (4)

Q2 Age- I am:

- 18-27 (1)
- 28-39 (2)
- 40-50 (3)
- 51-60 (4)
- Over 60 (6)

Note: If age groups other than 18-27 and 51-60 were selected, participants exited from survey.

Consent form

Q3 Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to collect data on how people evaluate individuals on how they tell jokes.

All responses in this study will be anonymous. Data collected will be confidential and only accessible to the researchers. No information regarding your identity will be used. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may stop without penalty at any time if you feel uncomfortable. If any problem arises during the course of the experiment, please inform the experimenter immediately via our Mechanical Turk account. If the problem involves the experimenter's treatment of you and she cannot or does not resolve it to your satisfaction, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Wellesley College that oversees the running of experiments. At this time, please note down Wellesley College's Institutional Review Board email address, PsychERB@wellesley.edu in case any issues arise with the experiment that are not satisfactorily addressed by the researchers.

The study is designed to take 15-20 minutes. You will first be asked basic demographic questions, such as your age and gender. You will then be asked some questions about your national background and language background and how you would rate yourself as having various attributes. Once this section is complete, you will read transcriptions of jokes told by different people and will be asked to rate these speakers on funniness and other qualities. It is important that you pay attention and read each joke carefully. You will occasionally be asked questions that are included to ensure that you are paying attention. The jokes do not contain inappropriate or offensive material. However, if you find them personally offensive, or offensive to a group with which you associate, you should notify the experimenter immediately via our Mechanical Turk account. At the end of the experiment, you will be given an informational letter to let you know more about our study. If you have any other questions, please feel free to ask. Thank you.

I have read and understood all the instructions for this experiment and by clicking "Agree," voluntarily consent to participate. I understand that my data will be kept strictly confidential and that I may cease my participation in the study at any time.

- Agree (1)
- Disagree (2)

Note: If "disagree" was selected, participants exited from survey.

Introduction to experiment

Q4 You will be reading transcriptions of jokes told by students as part of a public speaking course at a university. You will read a joke and then be asked to tell us what you think of the student. The instructor of the course wants to measure how funny, influential, and competent the students in the course are while telling their jokes. Remember: The instructor cares most about how students tell their jokes, and not about what joke they tell. There are eight jokes in all. You will occasionally be asked questions about the joke you just read to make sure that you are paying attention. Please note that an ellipsis such as [...] in the transcript means that the speaker hesitated for about two seconds.

Note: Only unhedged jokes are used in the following examples. Please see Appendix I for hedged versions of jokes.

Joke 1 – Bear

Q72 _____ told the following joke. Please read the joke and respond to the questions below:

"Two hikers were walking through the woods when they noticed that a bear was charging toward them in the distance...The first hiker removed his hiking boots and began to lace up his running shoes...The second hiker laughed and said, 'Why bother changing your boots? You can't outrun a bear!'...The first hiker replied, 'I don't have to outrun the bear...I only have to outrun you.' "

Q9 Have you heard this joke before?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q12 How funny was the joke?

- Not funny1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely funny7 (7)

Q13 If you had to rate _____ on _____ funniness, how funny would you say _____ is?

- Not funny1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely funny7 (7)

Q14 If you had to rate _____ on _____ competence, how competent would you say _____ is?

- Not competent1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely competent7 (7)

Q15 If you had to rate _____'s ability to influence you, what rating would you give _____?

- Not influential1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely influential7 (7)

Joke 2 - Peanuts

Q22 _____ told the following joke. Please read the joke and respond to the questions below:

"A man walks into a bar one afternoon, sits on a stool, and asks the bartender for a beer. When the bartender brings the drink he says, 'Will you be OK out here for a few minutes? I have to do a few things in the back.' 'Sure,' says the man, 'Take your time'...Shortly after the bartender leaves for the back room, the man hears someone say, 'You're looking pretty good. Have you been working out?' 'Not very much,' says the man, as he looks around...But he can see no one. As he turns back to his beer, he hears the voice again...'That's a nice shirt you're wearing. It goes well with your pants.' Again the man can see no one, and he is becoming uneasy. When the bartender returns from his errands, the man says to him, 'The funniest damned thing has been going on. Someone seems to

be talking to me, but I can't see anyone'...'Oh, that,' says the bartender. 'It's the peanuts. They're complimentary.'"

Q23 Have you heard this joke before?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q24 How funny was the joke?

- Not funny1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely funny7 (7)

Q25 If you had to rate _____ on _____ funniness, how funny would you say _____ is?

- Not funny1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely funny7 (7)

Q26 If you had to rate _____ on _____ competence, how competent would you say _____ is?

- Not competent1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely competent7 (7)

Q27 If you had to rate _____'s ability to influence you, what rating would you give _____

- Not influential1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely influential7 (7)

Joke 3 – Millipede

Q16 _____told the following joke. Please read the joke and respond to the questions below:

"A young man lives alone and starts feeling lonely, so he goes to the pet shop to get something to keep him company. The pet shop owner suggested an unusual pet, a talking millipede...The man bought a millipede, took it home, and for lack of advance preparations, made it a temporary home in a cardboard box...That evening he leaned over the closed box and said, 'I'm going to the pub for a drink, do you want to come, too?' He waited for a few moments but there was no reply...He tried again, 'Hey, millipede, wanna come to the boozier with me?' Again, no response. He decided to give it one more try before returning the millipede to the pet shop. So he got really close to the box and repeated rather loudly, 'I SAID I'M GOING TO THE PUB FOR A DRINK. DO YOU WANNA COME?'...'I heard you the first time!' snapped the millipede, 'I'm putting my bloody shoes on!' "

Q17 Have you heard this joke before?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q18 How funny was the joke?

- Not funny1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely funny7 (7)

Q19 If you had to rate _____ on _____ funniness, how funny would you say _____ is?

- Not funny1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely funny7 (7)

Q20 If you had to rate _____ on _____ competence, how competent would you say _____ is?

- Not competent1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely competent7 (7)

Q21 If you had to rate _____'s ability to influence you, what rating would you give _____

- Not influential1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely influential7 (7)

Attention question 1

Q67 In the last joke, what was the pet millipede's house made of?

- Wood (1)
- Cardboard (2)
- He didn't have a house (3)

Joke 4 – Cold

Q28 _____ told the following joke. Please read the joke and respond to the questions below:

"A man is lying asleep with his wife one night when she wakes him, saying 'Close the window; it's cold outside'...He grunts, rolls over, and goes to sleep...His wife nudges him. 'Close the window; it's cold outside.' He moans, pulls the blankets closer, and goes back to sleep. Now his wife kicks him firmly and pushes him with both hands. 'Go on. Close the window; it's cold outside'...Grumbling, he slides out of bed, shuffles to the window, and bangs down the open lower half...Glaring at his wife he says, 'So now it's warm outside?' "

Q29 Have you heard this joke before?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q30 How funny was the joke?

- Not funny1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely funny7 (7)

Q31 If you had to rate _____ on _____ funniness, how funny would you say _____ is?

- Not funny1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely funny7 (7)

Q32 If you had to rate _____ on _____ competence, how competent would you say _____ is?

- Not competent1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely competent7 (7)

Q33 If you had to rate _____'s ability to influence you, what rating would you give _____

- Not influential1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely influential7 (11)

Joke 5 – Golf

Q47 _____ told the following joke. Please read the joke and respond to the questions below:

"As a funeral train passes by a golf course, a golfer on one of the greens stops and stands at attention...with his hat held over his heart as the hearse goes by...Then he goes back to lining up his putt...His playing partner remarks how that was the nicest gesture he'd ever seen, to show such respect for the dead. The first golfer sinks his putt and says...'Well, she was a good wife for sixteen years.' "

Q48 Have you heard this joke before?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q49 How funny was the joke?

- Not funny1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely funny7 (7)

Q50 If you had to rate _____ on _____ funniness, how funny would you say _____ is?

- Not funny1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely funny7 (7)

Q51 If you had to rate _____ on _____ competence, how competent would you say _____ is?

- Not competent1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely competent7 (7)

Q52 If you had to rate _____'s ability to influence you, what rating would you give _____

- Not influential1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely influential7 (7)

Joke 6 – Hell

Q53 _____ told the following joke. Please read the joke and respond to the questions below:

"A man left for a vacation to Jamaica. His wife was on a business trip and was planning to meet him there the next day...When he reached his hotel, he decided to send his wife a quick email. Unable to find the scrap of paper on which he had written her email address, he did his best to type it in from memory. Unfortunately...he missed one letter, and his note was directed instead to an elderly preacher's wife whose husband had passed away only the day before...When the grieving widow checked her email, she took one look at the monitor, let out a piercing scream, and fell to the floor dead...At the sound, her family rushed into the room and saw this note on the screen: 'Dearest Wife, Just got checked in. Everything prepared for your arrival tomorrow. Your Loving Husband P.S. Sure is hot down here.'"

Q54 Have you heard this joke before?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q55 How funny was the joke?

- Not funny1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely funny7 (7)

Q56 If you had to rate _____ on _____ funniness, how funny would you say _____ is?

- Not funny1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely funny7 (7)

Q57 If you had to rate _____ on _____ competence, how competent would you say _____ is?

- Not competent1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely competent7 (7)

Q58 If you had to rate _____'s ability to influence you, what rating would you give _____?

- Not influential1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely influential7 (7)

Joke 7 – Done for

Q41 _____ told the following joke. Please read the joke and respond to the questions below:

“A shipwreck survivor washes up on the beach of an island and is immediately surrounded by a group of native warriors... 'I'm done for,' the man cries in despair... 'No you are not,' comes a booming voice from the heavens. 'Listen carefully, and do exactly as I say. Grab the spear from the one who is beside you and shove it through the heart of the chief'... The man does so and the remainder of the band stare in disbelief. 'Now, what?' the man asks the heavens... 'Now, you're done for.' ”

Q42 Have you heard this joke before?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q43 How funny was the joke?

- Not funny1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely funny7 (7)

Q44 If you had to rate _____ on _____ funniness, how funny would you say _____ is?

- Not funny1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely funny7 (7)

Q45 If you had to rate _____ on _____ competence, how competent would you say _____ is?

- Not competent1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely competent7 (7)

Q46 If you had to rate _____'s ability to influence you, what rating would you give _____

- Not influential1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely influential7 (7)

Attention question 2

Q68 In the last joke, what did the shipwrecked man do?

- Shoved a spear through the heart of the chief (1)
- Challenged the chief to a fight (2)
- Gave up because he was, "Done for!" (3)

Joke 8 – Superman

Q35 _____told the following joke. Please read the joke and respond to the questions below:

"A man on a business trip is staying in a high-rise hotel with a bar on the top floor. After checking in and seeing his room, he decides to go upstairs. There's only one other patron in the bar. The businessman orders a drink and then watches in surprise as the other patron quickly eats an orange, chugs his beer, and jumps out the window...A minute later, the man returns. The businessman is shocked to see him again eat an orange, chug his beer and then jump out the window...When the man returns a third time, the businessman decides he can do this too. He eats an orange, chugs his beer...then jumps out the window to his death...The bartender turns to the man and says, 'You know, Superman you're a real jerk when you're drunk.' "

Q36 Have you heard this joke before?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q37 How funny was the joke?

- Not funny1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely funny7 (7)

Q38 If you had to rate _____on _____funniness, how funny would you say _____is?

- Not funny1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely funny7 (7)

Q39 If you had to rate _____ on _____ competence, how competent would you say _____ is?

- Not competent1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely competent7 (7)

Q40 If you had to rate _____'s ability to influence you, what rating would you give _____

- Not influential1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely influential7 (7)

Language and national identity

Q67 Were you born in the United States?

- I was born in the United States (1)
- I was not born in the United states (2)

Q68 How long have you lived in the United States?

- 0-4 years (1)
- 5-9 years (2)
- 10-14 years (3)
- 15-19 years (4)
- 21+ years (5)

Q69 If you were not born in the United States, where did you live before and for how long?

Q70 Do you speak any language other than English? If so, please describe in the space provided below what language you speak and for how many years you've spoken it.

Q71 National identity- I identify as:

- American (1)
- Other- Please specify (2) _____

Favorite comedians

Q80 Who is your favorite male comedian?

- Favorite male comedian: (1) _____
- I don't have a favorite male comedian (2)

Q82 Who is your favorite female comedian?

- Favorite female comedian: (1) _____
- I don't have a favorite female comedian (2)

Self ratings

Q72 Please rate yourself in each of the scales below:

Q73 How funny would you rate yourself as?

- Not funny1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely funny7 (7)

Q74 How competent would you rate yourself as?

- Not competent1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely competent7 (7)

Q75 How influential would you rate yourself as?

- Not influential1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Extremely influential7 (7)

Feedback and debriefing

Q66 What did you think of this study?

Q76 This study was designed to see if subtle differences in the use of language in jokes have an effect on how men and women are evaluated. You just took one of four different versions of a survey that contains the same 8 jokes. In each version of the survey, the same jokes are told by either men or women. Another difference between the surveys is that, in some of them, hedges, tag questions, and hesitations (represented by "...") were added to the jokes. Words such as "maybe," and "essentially" are called hedges and short phrases such as "Don't you think?" are called tag questions. Hedges and tag questions are used in speech to soften statements, usually by those who hold less power in an interaction. These kinds of words often make a statement seem less powerful because the speaker of the joke sounds more hesitant which makes his or her rendition of the joke less effective. It was important to add hedges, tag questions, and hesitations to the jokes because we are interested in how men and women are viewed when they tell jokes using both powerful and powerless styles. We expect that people whose jokes include less powerful forms of language will be perceived as less funny, influential, and competent.

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