



# I Remember Him (But Not Her) Being Funny

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## Introduction

There is a common conjecture in the lay public that females are not as funny as males. The following are quotes extracted from various sources that support that notion:

"I don't like any female comedians, ...A woman doing comedy doesn't offend me but sets me back a bit. ...."  
- Jerry Lewis (2000)

"Why are women, who have the whole male world at their mercy, not funny? Please do not pretend not to know what I am talking about."  
- Christopher Hitchens (2007)

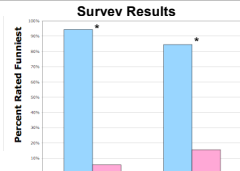
"Women ... have not developed the arts of fooling, clowning, badinage, repartee, burlesque and innuendo into a semi-continuous performance as so many men have."  
- Germaine Greer (2009)

"I'm not gonna guide any lady though comedy...first of all, I'd have to figure out how a lady could do comedy ..."  
- Norm MacDonald (2009)

To test whether this reflects the truth or a bias or biases of some sort(s), we gathered survey data (simply asked who was funnier, males or females) and conducted two experiments: a caption rating experiment and a source memory experiment. We hypothesized that subjects would rate captions written by males and females as being equally funny but would remember the funniest captions as having been written by a male and the least funny captions as having been written by a female.

## Survey: Who is Funnier?

Male and female subjects from both experiments were asked who is funnier males or females. The majority of subjects replied males. Only one male said females.



## Experiment 1: Methods

### Part 1:

- Materials:**  
•20 New Yorker™ cartoons without captions  
**Procedure:**  
•Subjects wrote one caption for each cartoon image

**Subjects:**  
UCSD undergraduates  
•16 females  
•16 males

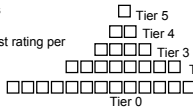


### Part 2:

- Materials:**  
•20 New Yorker™ cartoons and 32 captions each (obtained from Part 1)  
**Procedure:**  
•Subjects chose the funniest captions

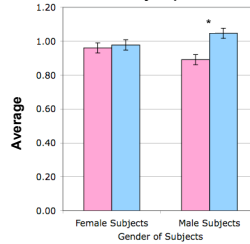
**Subjects:**  
•20 females  
•20 males

**Analysis:**  
•Average funniest rating per caption writer  
•Reliability tests



## Experiment 1: Results

Funniness by Caption Writer



There were significant differences between female and male caption writers in terms of funniness ratings.

- Males find male humor funnier  $t = 4.05, p < .001$
- Females find males and females equally funny  $t = .46, p = 0.649$ .

## Experiment 2: Methods

**Materials:**  
•20 New Yorker™ cartoons with 40 captions

**Subjects:**  
•13 females  
•15 males

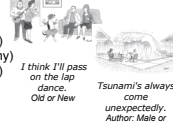
**Analysis:**  
•T-tests

### Procedure:

- Study:**  
•40 captions; 20 images  
•1/2 funny ;1/2 not funny by males & females caption writers



- Test:**  
•20 captions  
•8 male (1/2 funny)  
•8 female (1/2 funny)  
•4 lures (1/2 funny)



## Experiment 2: Results

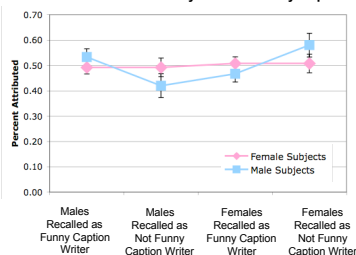
Table. Percent Correct (sd) on Memory

	Old/New Decision	Source Decision
Female Subjects	0.95 (0.06)	0.80 (0.07)
Male Subjects	0.97 (0.04)	0.76 (0.12)

There was a trend for male subjects to remember males as the authors of the funny captions. They were also more likely to remember the females as writing the not funny captions.

This pattern was not the case for female subjects.

Source Recalled For Funny and Not Funny Captions



## Survey: Discussion

### Survey: Who is Funnier?

•When given a forced choice question of who is funnier, 90% of our male and female subjects chose males.

## Experiment 1: Discussion

### Writing and Rating

•Female subjects rated captions written by males and females equally, but male subjects rated male captions significantly funnier.

## Experiment 2: Discussion

### The Source Memory Experiment

•**Retrieval Bias** - if there is a *retrieval bias*, we would expect to see subjects remembering the one gender as funnier or less funny than the other. So far, there does not appear to be one in female subjects. Males subjects, however, tended to remember females as the writers of the captions that were not funny and males as the writers of the captions that were funny.

## Conclusion

•So, it is the case that males are funnier ... to men.

## References

Clark, M. (2000). Jerry Lewis Tells it Like it is [www.usatoday.com](http://www.usatoday.com).  
Greer, G. (2009). Beaten to the Punchline. [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk).  
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