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走出去 a bit."
  - Jerry Lewis (2002)
- "Why are women, who have the whole male world at their mercy, not funny? Please do not prefer 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 (2000)
- "I’m not gonna judge any lady though comedy… that of all, I’d have to figure out how a lady could do comedy…"
  - Norm MacDonald (2003)

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 was funnier males or females. The majority of subjects replied males. Only one male said females.

Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tier 1</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Experiment 1: Methods

Part 1: Materials:
- 20 New Yorker™ cartoons without captions
- Subjects wrote one caption for each cartoon image

Part 2: Materials:
- 20 New Yorker™ cartoons and 32 captions each (obtained from Part 1)
- Subjects chose the funniest captions

Analysis:
- Average funniest rating per caption writer
- Reliability tests

Table. Percent Correct (sd) on Memory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Tier 0</th>
<th>Tier 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.95 (0.06)</td>
<td>0.80 (0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.97 (0.04)</td>
<td>0.76 (0.12)</td>
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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.

Experiment 2: Results

Table. Percent Correct (sd) on Memory

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<th>Gender</th>
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Writing and Rating
- Male subjects rated male captions significantly funnier.
- Female subjects rated captions written by males and females equally, but male subjects rated male captions significantly funnier.

Conclusion

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

References