

# Comedic Dominance:

## Dominance's Effect on Comedic Perception and the Potential Role That Gender Plays

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### Introduction

- \*Theories of comedy are receiving increased interest (e.g. Morreall, 1993)
- \* The International Affective Picture System (IAPS), in this study limited to its measurement tool, The Self-Assessment Manikin (SAM), works well as a matrix for studying humor and comedy.
- \*Earlier research suggested that dominance and valence scores, measured with IAPS forms, were correlated with reports of positive humorous content.
- \*Jerry Seinfeld's *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee* (CCGC) is an ideal sample set, in which one comedian, Jerry, interacts individually with a diverse set of other comedians in a controlled setting.
- \*Even in this setting, however, there are numerous factors potentially affecting observers' reactions, which we have begun to explore.

### Hypothesis

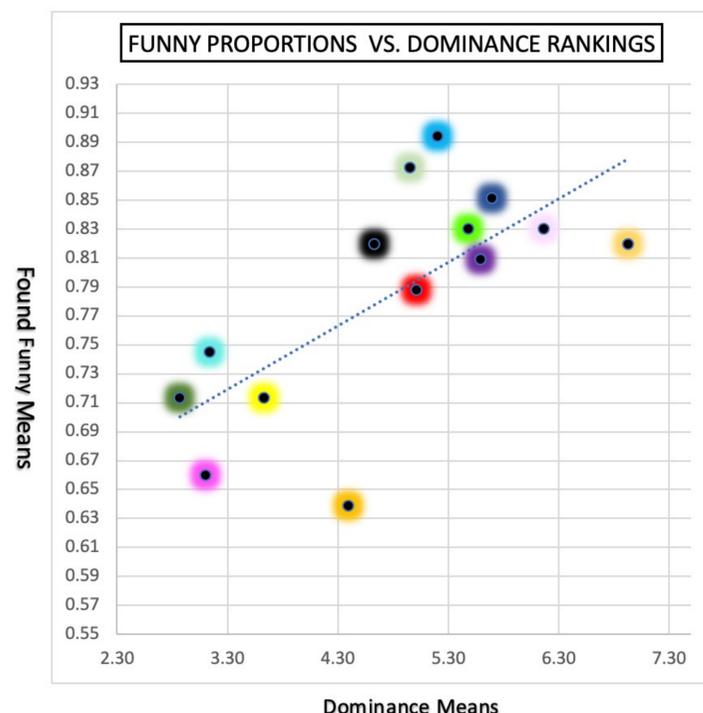
- \* Following from earlier results, we predicted that both the valence and dominance scores of the comedians opposite of Seinfeld would correlate with agreements that a clip was funny.

### Methods

- Forty-seven participants (thirty-five women, twelve men) recruited through the University of Pennsylvania Sona System
- Participants were asked to complete a survey containing fourteen clips from **exclusively women comedians** in "Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee"
  - The clips varied between thirty and forty-five seconds in duration
  - Each clip involved a different comedian interacting with Jerry Seinfeld
- After watching each clip, participants were prompted to rate the clip on the dimensions of valence, arousal, and dominance on a 9-point scale
- Participants were also asked to rank whether the clip was funny or not on a binary scale
- Responses were recorded on a 9-point scale represented by SAM (Self Assessment Manikin) shown below

<b>Was this interaction pleasant or unpleasant?</b>				
Very Pleasant	Somewhat Pleasant	Neither Pleasant or Unpleasant	Somewhat Unpleasant	Very Unpleasant
<b>Was this interactive stimulating or calming?</b>				
Very Exciting	Somewhat Exciting	Neither Exciting or Calming	Somewhat Calming	Very Calming
<b>How dominant is Jerry in this interaction?</b>				

### Results



- Comedian Key
- Kathleen Madigan
- Julia Louise Dreyfus
- Bridget Everett
- Margaret Cho
- Amy Schumer
- Miranda Sings
- Sarah Jessica Parker
- Tina Fey
- Kristen Wigg
- Sarah Silverman
- Ellen DeGeneres
- Ali Wentworth
- Kate McKinnon
- Melissa Villasenor

- There was a strong positive relationship between the ratings of Jerry's dominance and the likelihood of finding a clip to be funny
- Pearson Correlation= .69
- Significance (two-tailed)= .007
- Unlike dominance ratings, neither valence nor arousal ratings correlated significantly with the tendency to find clips funny
- We tested for differences between men and women participants' ratings for each of the fourteen clips. The genders differed significantly on two of the fourteen

### Discussion

- Results from an earlier study using both men and women comedians (predominantly men) in CCGC suggest that the gender of the guest comedian may interact with the ratings of Jerry's perceived dominance/valence ratings in influencing perceived funniness.
- The relationship for dominance and perceived comedy in this study expands on these findings with a positive correlation between Jerry's dominance and perception of comedy when studying only women comedians.
- This comparison of correlations between men and women comedians hints that there are distinct factors that could contribute to the perception of comedy between different groups.
- Further investigation is needed on whether the observed ratings and relationships of comedic effect and emotional judgments are reliably robust when the selections from the clips are based on objective criteria rather than the experimenters' aesthetic judgments.

### References

- Morreall, John. *Taking Laughter Seriously*. State University of New York Press, 1993.
- Bradley, M. M., & Lang, P. J. (2007). The International Affective Picture System (IAPS) in the study of emotion and attention. In J. A. Coan & J. J. B. Allen (Eds.), *Series in affective science. Handbook of emotion elicitation and assessment* (pp. 29-46). New York, NY, US: Oxford University Press.