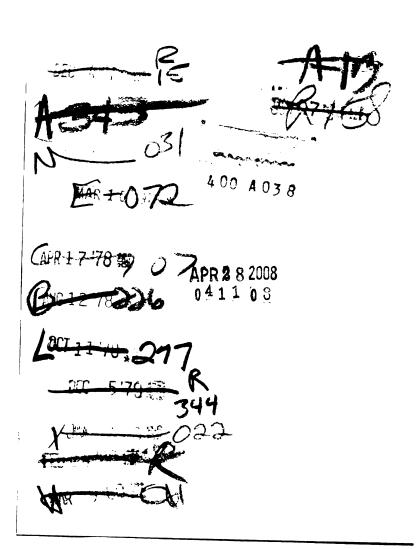THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN HUMOR

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.
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HOWARD HARRY BALL
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ABSTRACT

THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN HUMOR

By

Howard Harry Ball

The position of women in society with regard to
domination-subordination was examined by using jokes as
an indicator of cultural patterns. A content analysis
was performed on jokes from two anthologies reflecting
two time periods, 1936 and 1972, respectively. From
within these, a random sample of 300 jokes was drawn.

Two modes of dominance were formulated: the personal
mode and the institutional mode. In the personal mode
the findings were that dominance of males over females
exceeded dominance of females over males in 1936, while
in 1972 dominance of females over males exceeded dominance
of males over females. The change was accounted for by
a decrease in males dominating females. Recently there
is less dominance of either kind. Dominance is princi-
pally a same-sex phenomenon.

The institutional mode findings are that males have
higher occupational rankings overall, higher occupational
and higher status rankings even when women are dominant

in the personal mode, and greater frequency of occupational mention. The inequality is larger for 1972 than 1936.

THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN HUMOR

By

Howard Harry Ball

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INTRODUCTION

At the time this is being written a Women's Liberation Movement has been ongoing for a number of years in the society. Among the premises of this movement are that women are an oppressed group, dominated by men, that women have been treated unequally and discriminately in jobs, that women receive less of the rewards of the society than men.

Already social science has been brought to bear on this "social problem." For example, studies show woman's image in advertising (Komisar, 1971) and textbooks (U'ren, 1971) is invidious. Similarly their position in the economy (see Knudsen, 1971) has been shown to be an unfavorable position relative to men. The case for the existence of differentials of economic rewards also seems to be beyond doubt. These differentials are obviously due to discrimination. Discrimination usually occurs in forms prescribed by institutional and cultural patterns. For its beneficiaries its immediate effects, at least, may often be benign; and women often are its beneficiaries.

The effect of such cultural patterns requires some inferences that often cannot be demonstrated directly.

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Therefore, the more studies that indicate bias in cultural patterns, the stronger the case that differentials are due to sexism and not chance or arbitrary distinctions. This is more or less a basic assumption of content analysis (Berelson, 1952: 18; Berelson, 1948: 20-24). Studies which illustrate by example that the image of woman is that of a limited and/or inferior person are useful, but fail to show how much more often this is the case than the reverse image, for which examples of capable, equal or superior may also be found (that is, such studies do not meet the "requirement of system" Berelson describes--1952: 17. Studies which illustrate by example do not lend themselves to hypothesis testing oriented toward establishing scientific propositions. They do not allow statements of relative emphases and omissions).

The use of content analysis on products of the culture, especially its mass media, has been a traditional approach in ethnic studies (e.g., Berelson, 1946; Barron, 1950). It therefore seems that application of this technique in an additional study might be a fruitful contribution towards strengthening or weakening arguments about the nature of cultural patterns in the instance of women. The aim is to be somewhat more quantitative than some earlier studies (such as Komisar, 1971).

Barron's (1950) study on humor is impressively novel; most content analyses use serious material of

substantial length. The assumption associated with serious material is that behind the theme, or phrases or key words lies an intention, or at least a habit of thinking, that relates more or less straightforwardly to the material. If positively evaluated adjectives always appear with male descriptions and the opposite with female descriptions, then a pro-male bias may be indicated.

But jokes and anecdotes are generally much shorter than stories; they rely even more on stereotypes and the adjective may be used simply to make the joke funnier. Thus, straightforward assumptions may be less relevant. However, this is a question of degree, not kind. We might find that males are described with positive adjectives and females with negative ones in jokes and draw the same conclusion. On the other hand, much in humor depends on the meanings the reader/listener supplies. Some degree of subtlety seems to be incorporated in jokes. We doubt that the straightforward application of many techniques such as adjective counts can tap all that a joke conveys.

Whereas, for example, a short story might indicate insult by derogatory words, jokes may insult by the inference or the conclusion one makes. The emotional force associated with a joke's punchline can add strength that might not show up with conventional techniques.

Read the following selection:

> The young lady nodded her head at what the
> psychiatrist was telling her, and said, "Yes,
> I see, Dr. Schmidt. At least, I see every-
> thing but one point. The one thing I'm
> hazy about is this phallic symbol you men-
> tioned. What's a phallic symbol?
>   "A phallic symbol," said the psychia-
> trist, "is anything that can be used to
> represent or symbolize a phallus."
>   "But what is a phallus, doctor?"
>   The psychiatrist said, "I think I can
> explain that most clearly by a demonstration."
> He stood up, unzipped, and said, "This my
> dear young lady, is a phallus."
>   "Oh," said the girl, suddenly compre-
> hending, "I see. You mean it's like a prick,
> only smaller." (Asimov, 1971: 378)

Somehow it seems to us that a woman accusing a man of

having a small penis, while insulting, is far more force-

ful as an insult in the punchline to a joke!

We are obliquely pointing to the problem of the unit

of analysis. Whether to take the word, the sentence or

the theme as the unit of analysis may be more a matter of

choice in cases other than jokes. With jokes, using the

theme or entire joke as the unit of analysis may be

virtually dictated. For example, who is dominant in the

joke above? We might say there is a doctor-patient

relation or, more generally, an expert-layman relation,

indicating the man is dominant. The ability to insult is

another indication of dominance, one which both male and

female here achieve (the male by his act, which was

unprofessional, the woman by her comment, which was

degrading). But getting in the last insult (by virtue

of the joke ending) is, in our opinion, the most important.

It sets the joke apart, as the editor (Asimov) says,
an anti-psychiatrist joke; the woman is the unquestion-
able victor.

FUNCTIONS OF HUMOR

While humor lends itself to study as data on cultural patterns generally, there is an additional reason why humor may be useful for studying male-female relations. The reason is that

> Humor lends itself particularly well to use
> as a conflict device because of its almost
> boundless limits in subject matter, and
> because its nature is such that it often
> contains more or less well concealed malice.
>   (Burma, 1946: 710)

The utility of humor for control and expression of conflict has received notice by several authors. Burma (1946: 710) in his article goes on to say,

> Throughout the history of minority-majority
> relations in this country the set of tech-
> niques which we may denominate by the general
> term humor has played a definite role in
> inter-personal and inter-group relationships.
> Apparently all minority groups suffer in
> this manner, and apparently all use the same
> weapon in return.

While the question of the theoretical status of women as a minority group is interesting and one we hope to address ourselves to in another paper, here we wish merely to acknowledge that women often seem to suffer the same fate as minorities and there is sufficient reason to examine humor as it pertains to women.

Whether humor is returned by women is an issue which seems to be a subject of debate for social scientists (Weisstein, 1973) and the popular press (see, for example, Harrington, 1973: 21).

Berlyne (1954: 811) quotes Stephenson on the conflict and control functions of humor. Humor may "strengthen the morale of those who are present and undermine the morale of those against which it is aimed..." and it may "express approval or disapproval, develop common attitudes, indicate safety or friendship."

Coser (according to Berlyne, 1954: 811), for example, found that in staff meetings at a psychiatric hospital

> More jocular remarks were made by senior participants than juniors....Seniors frequently used juniors as targets for their wit, but the converse never occurred...[while] the usual targets for juniors were either themselves or patients and patients' associates.

The interpretation of these observations was that humor expressed aggression on one hand, while under certain circumstances it served "to reconcile and affirm social values."

Weisstein (1973: 51) succinctly summarizes some of the functions of humor:

> ...to establish, maintain or reinforce differences in power. Humor can serve as an expression of pleasure, affection, love, play, recreation, or an aesthetic, and be used as a vehicle for wit, argument, thought. But it can also be used as an expression of the exclusion of others; it can define normative behavior; it can be used as a signal that a situation is not at all serious, or that it

> is so serious that we had better laugh if
> we are to be able to do battle with it; it
> can be used as a display of personal charm
> and attractiveness.

Given the above uses of humor, it would seem neglectful not to study also its content, especially as a device of domination.

Weisstein (1973) seems to think that the so-called lack of sense of humor among participants in the woman's movement is at least two-fold. First, women are not laughing any more at jokes that are insulting to them and, secondly, a women's subculture has yet to be developed. She notes that other oppressed groups have developed humor--"it is a weapon or a technique of survival used by the oppressed. It is the powerless fighting back" (p. 88).

This author finds that Weisstein's observations are selective, focusing only on the humor of the oppressed group that ridicules the oppressor and ignoring ways in which a group laughs at itself--as, for example, the section of Jewish jokes selected by the Jewish Asimov (1971).[*] However, it is not our purpose to join in this

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[*]It is this, I think, that is behind the charge of a lack of sense of humor in the women's movement--a charge that Weisstein fails to adequately answer. Women do suffer many things, I agree, and on the face of it this would seem to be why women don't laugh. But other suffering groups laugh at themselves; why are women different: Or are they? Any copy of *Playgirl* magazine will have funny cartoons involving women, and I presume women laugh at them, although I would not describe the involvement as derogatory to women. Barrie Thorne notes

debate at this time. Rather, analysis can reveal whether there are jokes where women get the better of men, how often they appear, and in what form; as well, of course, as the reverse situation.

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that many women's magazines have male editors. This is obviously an interesting path for inquiry but one beyond the scope of our present purpose.

Jokes of this sort are, we would assume, most prevalent in sources generally restricted to women, such as women's magazines. How often they appear in a general collection, therefore, might be an underestimate of the existence of these jokes. Yet appearance in general collections, especially those edited by males, may therefore be a better reflection of the culture overall.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

The specific assumption of this study was stated
earlier: the content of jokes with regard to sexism is
a reflection of the culture of American society. The
general assumption of content analyses at large, of
which this specific assumption is a part, is as follows:

> Content analysis assumes that inferences about
> relationships between intent and content or
> between content and effect can validly be
> made or the actual relationships established.
> (Berelson, 1948: 6)

* * * * * * * * *

> This assumption that knowledge of the content
> can legitimately support inferences about
> non-current events is basic to the central
> contribution of content analysis, namely to
> illuminate certain non-content areas....
> Content analysis is done to reveal the pur-
> poses, motives, and other characteristics of
> the communicators as they are (presumably)
> "reflected" in the content....
> (Berelson, 1948: 6)

A second assumption that Berelson considers funda-
mental to content analysis is that the study of manifest
content is meaningful. That is, the "meanings" the
analyst uses correspond to the "meanings" intended by the
communicator or his audience.

Berelson considers "manifest content" to vary along
a continuum. That is, the more manifest the content, the

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more different readers will assign the same meaning to
that content. A news story of a train wreck is an
example from the "highly manifest" end of the continuum,
while an obscure modern poem is at the other end (where
it is unlikely that two different readers will get iden-
tical meanings from the content).

The material utilized in this study departs from
the ideal of perfect manifest content. However, it is
more manifest than latent. The categories are chosen to
tap such manifest content, e.g., occupations.

A third assumption listed by Berelson is:

> Content analysis assumes that the quantitative
> description of communication content is mean-
> ingful. This assumption implies that fre-
> quency of occurrence of various characteristics
> of the content is itself an important factor
> in the communication process, under specific
> conditions.   (1948: 8)

The particular use of content analysis in this study
rests upon the above assumption. This use falls under
one of three main groupings identified by Berelson:

> First, there are the analyses of content
> which are designed to illuminate the cultural
> or personal conditions under which the com-
> munication was produced, i.e. the precondi-
> tions which determine the nature of communica-
> tion. In this group are the following
> specific uses:

> To reflect attitudes and interests
> ("cultural patterns") of population
> groups....   (1848: 18)

A second use of the content analysis here is from
Berelson's second group--"To describe trends in communi-
cation content" (1946: 18).

SAMPLE

The usual notion behind a sample is that it should be obtained in such a way as to be representative of the universe one is sampling. Most commonly this is done by selecting a random sample. Every unit should have an equal chance of being included in the sample. This requires a list of every unit in the universe or some mechanism for choosing in a genuinely random fashion.

Thus, the first problem was to select a random sample of jokes from all jokes produced or being used in a particular time period. A practical way of doing so is impossible. Limiting the universe to all *published* jokes does not overcome this difficulty.

In order to meet the requirements of practicality, the choice of a random sample at this level was abandoned. Instead two anthologies were selected on an availability basis; one bore the copyright date of 1936 (Copeland), and the other 1972 (Asimov).

These available anthologies were thought to be good sources because anthologies tend to be inclusive of all the jokes repeated at a particular time and remembered from the recent past. They cover several themes and subjects and tend to be less typed and selective than the

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jokes in a particular magazine. This is far more
efficient than trying to sample from many issues of many
different magazines. It also avoids excessive redundancy.

Within this now limited "universe" of jokes in each
anthology a random sample was chosen by using a table of
random numbers.[*] Since one anthology has its jokes
numbered consecutively, the table could be applied
directly. The other anthology had only pages numbered;
therefore, the table was used to choose pages. Once a
page was chosen, a joke was selected on that page by the
roll of a die, counting down the page the same number of
jokes as the number shown on the die.

Because of the way the sample was selected, inferen-
tial statistics can be validly used only for generalizing
to the level of the anthologies. Inferences to jokes at
large and cultural patterns generally can, of course, be
made but cannot be supported with inferential statistics.
This is no greater limitation than that of many similar
studies, but one not to be forgotten.

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[*]This is the difference between the *target universe*
and the *sampled universe* (Mueller, 1961: 341).

PROBLEM

Thus far, we have given the reasons why we expect a content analysis of jokes to be a worthwhile investigation and have stated the problem in a general way. Now hypotheses will be stated explicitly and specifically.

To review, the general statement of the problem is that there is subordination of women in society and its associated cultural patterns. Jokes were the chosen indicator of cultural patterns. The major hypothesis states that in jokes men are dominant over women.

This hypothesis can be formulated in detailed operational terms both generally and with specific sub-hypotheses (to follow later).

The concern for domination-subordination led to a personalistic focus. After reading several jokes at the beginning of analysis, domination seemed most forcibly expressed in personal terms, one individual pitted against another. In America, jokes tend to portray personal relationships. Even jokes about groups such as religious groups express their points through the vehicle of individuals. Thus, a joke that would show some difference between three religious groups will have Reverend Brown, perhaps, Rabbi Levine, and Father Sweeny.

For example, this joke from *Ms. Magazine* (November 1973):

> MAN: Do you know the Women's Movement has
>   no sense of humor?
> WOMAN: No.....but hum a few bars and I'll
>   fake it!

was analyzed as having the woman dominate by use of a (quasi) minority stereotype by the (quasi) minority group member against the dominant;[*] that is, turning tables. Additionally, it is the woman who changes the subject and who gets in the last word. Another example is the anti-psychiatrist joke quoted earlier. There the woman dominates by insult.

This personalistic focus led to various "domination methods" including, for example, such methods as insulting, implying ignorance, having the last word, possessing special privilege, and changing the subject.

Some colleagues have argued that in the psychiatrist joke, the man's occupational status made him dominant. More properly speaking, this is a role relationship of professional-client. The woman's occupation, if any, is not revealed. These colleagues are, of course, correct about this role relationship. It is also significant that the woman's occupation is not revealed while the man's is revealed. But who is dominant? Within the context of this joke the woman clearly comes out ahead.

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[*]See Hacker (1951).

To avoid ambiguity in coding such situations, an occupational category was tabulated separately, as was certain additional status information. Two modes of dominance were postulated: *the personal mode*, which included the sorts of methods indicated above (see also Table 13), and *the institutional mode*, which included status attributes such as occupational role. Although sought, no special formula for integrating both modes was found.

Recording of the method of domination was retained and understood to apply to the personal mode only.

Hypotheses 1 to 7 are personal mode hypotheses. Hypotheses 8 and 9, while more institutional in nature, are provided for descriptive purposes and the hypotheses that follow test facets of the institutional mode.

H_{1A}: The relative frequency of jokes with men dominant over women is greater than the relative frequency of jokes with women dominant over men.

Operationally, this is simply a counting procedure using as the unit of analysis the *item*. The items in this case are the jokes in the sample. Elsewhere in the analysis we will use as the unit of analysis the *characters* in the jokes. Dominance was determined by judgmental decisions made by the author. Part of the basis of these judgments was identifying a domination method (e.g., insult, or other methods listed in Table 13).

While the major hypothesis stated that men are dominant over women, this raises the question whether this has always been so. It is presumed that in many areas society has moved away from clear, fixed roles for males and females to a society with unclear, overlapping roles. Therefore, we have included two time periods in the sample to provide some trend data and can add the hypothesis that men are dominant over women but less so now than in the past. Operationally H_{1A} will cover the combined sample so that H_{1B} can be added.

H_{1B}: The percentage difference between jokes with men dominant over women and jokes with women dominant over men is smaller for 1972 than 1936.

What is being said here is that we expect the advantage males have over females is becoming smaller over time. The male's advantage is the amount that *male over female* dominance exceeds *female over male* dominance (female advantage is the amount that *female over male* dominance exceeds *male over female* dominance).

On assumption behind hypotheses H_{1A} and H_{1B} is that the percentage of jokes with men dominant over women is reciprocal with the percentage of jokes with women dominant over men. However, there may be a large "neutral" segment from which increases or decreases are drawn. Therefore, the following hypotheses were formulated as guides to a more careful analysis:

H_2: The relative frequency of jokes with women dominant over men has increased over time.

H_3: The relative frequency of jokes with men dominant over women has decreased over time.

Along the same line of thought we realized that men might still be dominant in jokes but their domination might not be over women but be an increased domination over other men. That is, male domination whether over males or females is likely to be a constant. Similarly with women. Therefore, two additional hypotheses were formulated:

H_4: The relative frequency of men dominant over men has increased over time.

H_5: The relative frequency of women dominant over women has decreased over time.

The presumption here is that if men have a constant need to dominate and if they are dominating women less, they must consequently be dominating others (men) more. The presumption with regard to women is that if there is a constant need to dominate, and if they are dominating males more often, then they must be dominating women less often.

Berelson says

> Content analysis stands or falls by its cate-
> gories. Particular studies have been pro-
> ductive to the extent that the hypotheses
> have been insightful and the categories
> clearly formulated and well adapted to the
> communication content.   (1948: 88)

The categories for the above hypotheses form a group which was labeled "pattern of dominance": (1) male over male (M/M), (2) male over female (M/F), (3) female over female (F/F), (4) female over male (F/M), (5) not applicable (NA), (6) other. The "other" category gave way upon analysis to additional categories for jokes with indeterminate sex members: male over indeterminate (M/I), female over indeterminate sex (F/I), indeterminate sex over male (I/M), and indeterminate over female (I/F).

The hypotheses thus far focus on the concern for power in the form of personal dominance. But there is a subtler form of favoritism: attention. Do men or women receive more attention? Because more attention is given to more highly valued objects, more characters in jokes will come from more highly valued categories of people. Evidence indicates that qualities of maleness are more highly valued in society than qualities of femaleness. Therefore:

H_8: Men will appear more often in jokes than women.

This is a simple count of males and females (the categories) regardless of the number of jokes. This is

dependent on the selection of jokes--male names often
being used as a convention when sex doesn't matter.
More telling and useful for comparison may be:

H_9: There will be more male characters in each
joke than female characters.

In the extreme case attention is simply given to one
sex in virtually all activities, the other being seen as
unessential or a group of non-persons.[*]
Three hypotheses were formulated concerning the
institutional mode. Occupation being of high importance
to one's overall status, the expection is:

H_{10}: In each joke in which men's and women's
occupations can be identified, men's occupations will
be superior in rank to women's occupations.

Because of the duality of domination modes, we
hypothesized that one might be a compensation, of sorts,
for the other. When women bested men, which we expected
would be via the personal mode, men might have superior
social positions. Thus:

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[*]See Goffman's discussion (pp. 151-153) of non-
person, especially "...the role of non-person usually
carries with it some subordination..." (p. 152).

H_{11}: When women are personally dominant over men, the men will have suprior status attributes such as

  A. occupation
  B. majority-minority or minority rankings (e.g., ethnic minority woman, ethnic majority male)
  C. other status attributes.

This is in some sense a test of "compensation." The two different modes may have a sex-role association and, if they occur in a pattern, it would suggest a weighting scheme, that "really" the institutional mode counts for more.

If the two modes could be independently ranked and if the hypothesis is found true, it would be a further confirmation that we live in a male dominated society. The hypothesis is also a test of status inconsistency; our expectation is that people's status will be inconsistent in a way that results in male dominance, or ameliorates a male's otherwise poor status. Thus, the hypothesis is phrased in the above terms rather than vice-versa.

This would allow us to see if women ever become "fully dominant" over men--the presumably rare event.

RESULTS

The Copeland anthology yielded a sample of 146 jokes
while the Asimov anthology yielded a sample of 154 jokes
for a combined total of 300 jokes. For each joke sampled
a coding sheet indicated the sex of each character for
up to four characters, the domination pattern (e.g.,
male dominating a male was recorded M/M), the method of
dominance (e.g., insult), the number of the dominant
character (i.e., 1, 2, 3, or 4), the number of the sub-
ordinated character, the occupation and its two digit
code for each of the four characters, the overall status
(low or high) rating for each character and other infor-
mation. This other information included a primary status
rating that was relevant to the relationship in the joke;
for example, mother, daughter, son, foreigner, aged (low),
aged (high), young (lo), young (hi), Jew, Black, Scotch,
etc. Also, an identification number, the page number on
which the joke appeared in the anthology, its place on
the page, the source anthology, etc., chapter number and
whether the character (1-4) spoke in dialect.

The information from these sheets was punched into
cards. Analysis was performed on the Michigan State

University CDC 6500 computer using the Statistical
Package for Social Scientists.

H_{1A} can be tested by Table 1.[*] The total sample
shows weak support. Thirty-four percent of all the
jokes had males dominant over females (M/F), while 33%
had females dominant over males (F/M). This percentage
was computed by using the 86 jokes which contained
characters of both sexes as a base.

However, this view of the overall sample masks what
has occurred at the two different points in time. Look-
ing again at Table 1, one sees moderate percentage dif-
ferences in each subsample. In 1936, males were dominant
over females more often than females were dominant over
males, while in 1972 the reverse was true. Thus, the
predicted trend of Hypothesis H_{1B} is supported.

Moreover, this reversal in dominance over time was
because of simultaneous but unequal change in both
patterns of dominance, M/F and F/M. Both of these moved
in the directions predicted by H_2 and H_3, respectively.
Note that the change in M/F was greater (13%) than that
of F/M (3%).

If the amount of dominance in jokes is constant
over time, then the results above showing a decrease of
M/F jokes suggests an increase in other patterns. F/M

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[*]A listing of hypotheses and a summary of results
follows this section.

TABLE 1
RELATIVE FREQUENCIES OF MALE-DOMINATING-FEMALE AND
FEMALE-DOMINATING-MALE JOKES BY TIME PERIOD

Domination pattern time	1936	1972	Combined
Male dominating Female (M/F)	41% (16)	28% (13)	34% (29)
Female dominating Male (F/M)	31% (12)	34% (16)	33% (28)
Other*	28% (11)	38% (18)	33% (29)
Total 2 sex jokes	100% (39)	100% (47)	100% (86)
Percentage difference	10%	-6%	1%

*Jokes that had characters of both sexes but either had no dominant character or had M/I, I/M, F/I, or I/F. (I = indeterminate sex).

showed only a small increase; therefore, one might expect an increase in the patterns such as M/M, as H_4 predicts. However, Table 2 actually shows a decrease in the relative frequency of M/M jokes, refuting the hypothesis.

H_5, on the other hand, is supported. Line 2 of Table 3 shows a decrease of F/F jokes over time.

There is non-support for H_6. Table 3 indicates that, in relative terms, women usually dominate other women rather than dominating men, although the 1972 data show a 14% decline from 1936. (Each percentage was calculated on the appropriate base, two or more females for F/F jokes, two sex jokes for F/M.)

TABLE 2
RELATIVE FREQUENCY OF MALE-DOMINATING-MALE
JOKES BY TIME PERIOD

Time	Percent jokes Male-dominating-Male	Total jokes with two or more males
1936	60% (59)	98
1972	55% (62)	113
Total	57% (121)	211
Percentage difference	5%	

H_7 also must be rejected. M/M jokes occur about 40% more frequently than M/F jokes. Eighty-one percent of 73 jokes from 1936 were M/M compared to 41% of 39 jokes that were M/F, and 65% of 95 jokes were M/M from 1972 compared to 28% of 47 jokes that were M/F.

Men appear four times as frequently as women in the total sample, as the data in Table 4 show, supporting Hypothesis 8. This ratio of males to females was more pronounced in the 1936 sample, and declined in 1972. However, it may be in the world at large, jokes are a "man's world."

Consistent with findings on Hypothesis 8 are the findings for Hypothesis 9. This hypothesis is supported, as can be ascertained by carefully examining the sex distribution (in Appendix).

TABLE 3
RELATIVE FREQUENCIES OF FEMALE-DOMINATING-MALE
JOKES COMPARED TO FEMALE-DOMINATING-
FEMALE JOKES BY TIME PERIOD

1936

Domination pattern	Percent	Base N
Female dominating Male (F/M)	31%	100%=39*
Female dominating Female (F/F)	57%	100%=7**
Percentage difference	-26%	

1972

Domination pattern	Percent	Base N
Female dominating Male (F/M)	34%	100%=47*
Female dominating Female (F/F)	46%	100%=13**
Percentage difference	-12%	

Combined

Domination pattern	Percent	Base N
Female dominating Male (F/M)	33%	100%=86*
Female dominating Female (F/F)	50%	100%=20**
Percentage difference	-17%	

*All in sample containing members of both sexes (see Table 1).

**All jokes in sample with two or more females (see Table 14).

TABLE 4
FREQUENCY OF APPEARANCE IN JOKES BY SEX AND TIME PERIOD

Sex	1936	1972	Combined
Males	220	253	473
Females	50	68	118
Ratio of total males to total females	= 4.0		
Ratio of males to females in 1936	= 4.4		
Ratio of males to females in 1972	= 3.7		

To make this clear, the jokes that have more males
than females (e.g., MMF), which for convenience will be
called the male pattern, will be added up separately
from those containing more females than males, which will
be referred to as the female pattern. See Table 5.

TABLE 5
FREQUENCIES OF MALE AND FEMALE PATTERNS COMPARED

Pattern	1936	1972	Combined
Male pattern	67% (98)	70% (108)	69% (206)
Female pattern	5% (7)	6% (9)	5% (16)
Equality pattern	28% (41)	24% (37)	26% (78)
Total	100% (146)	100% (154)	100% (300)

As an indicator of equality of sorts, patterns MF and MMFF ("equality pattern") can be read from the table for comparison.

Because the male population so vastly outnumbers the female population and therefore many of the jokes are MM, some may argue that Table 5 is not a true reflection of the situation. However, even if jokes where only both sexes appear are looked at (patterns MMF, MMMF, vs. MFF, MFF, MFFF), the hypothesis remains affirmed (7 to 3 in 1936 and 16 to 3 in 1972).

Hypothesis 10 was tested by coding the occupations of characters with a two digit code--the "Socioeconomic Status Score for Categories of Occupation Component" as used in the 1960 Census (Miller, 1970: 179). The two digit code was punched on cards along with other data. The scale is termed one of status rankings and probably should be regarded as an ordinal scale. Even if not interval, there is a definite progression from lower to higher status in the ranking categories. For the gross comparisons made here, I have therefore used all jokes including both male and female in a routine that computed the average male occupational score for all the male characters in a particular joke and the average female occupational score for all the females in that same joke. Then a record was kept of the number of jokes with a higher average occupational score for males, the

number with a higher average for females, and the number where they were equal. Table 6 gives the results.

TABLE 6
NUMBER OF JOKES WITH SUPERIOR OCCUPATIONAL RANK BY SEX

	1936	1972	Combined
Males superior rank	39% (15)	49% (23)	44% (38)
Females superior rank	18% (7)	6% (3)	12% (10)
Equal rank	44% (17)	45% (21)	44% (38)
Total two sex jokes	101% (39)	100% (47)	100% (86)

The table indicates support for the hypothesis (H_{10}). This may be verified by comparing the average male and average female scores for each subsample or whole sample as in Table 7. (These averages were computed by a transformation that placed each character's sex and occupational score on a single IBM card. Thus, a card for each character. The routine cross-classified occupation by sex and gave mean scores as output.) Both of these tables suggest that inequality is becoming greater.

Data in Table 7 offer further confirmation. For the total sample, males averaged 66 points and females 48 points. There is a marked difference in male and female scores over time.

TABLE 7
AVERAGE OCCUPATIONAL SCORE BY SEX AND TIME PERIOD
(EXCLUDING NO MENTIONS)

Sex Time	1936	1972	Combined
Males	56	77	66
Females	50	45	48
Score difference	6	32	18

In a complete survey such as a Census there are a few who do not report an occupation. The Census Bureau took account of this, apparently, for they gave a score of 33 to those not reporting an occupation. In this analysis, which is not a survey as such, one can expect many instances of no occupation mentioned. Table 9 gives information on the frequency of no occupational mention. This will be commented on shortly.

TABLE 8
FREQUENCY OF MENTIONS OF OCCUPATION BY SEX AND TIME PERIOD

	1936	1972	Combined
(1) Male	125	111	236
(2) Female	13	9	22
Ratio of (1) to (2)	9.6	12.3	10.7

Not only are men's occupations superior in rank, but men's occupations are more frequently reported, as can be seen from Table 8. Men are listed with occupations about 11 times as often as women (236/22). It may be argued that this is an invalid comparison since men outnumber women in our sample by 4 to 1. This can be remedied by standardizing the female population by multiplying by four. Thus, the ratio of 236/88. But this is still a ratio of nearly 3 to 1 in favor of men.

TABLE 9
FREQUENCY OF NO MENTIONS OF OCCUPATIONS
BY SEX AND TIME PERIOD

	1936	1972	Combined
Male	92	142	234
Female	37	57	94
Total	129	199	328

In light of the above, it is perhaps not surprising that while men have about as many non-mentions of occupation as mentions, women have more than four times as many non-mentions as mentions (compare Tables 8 and 9). This is, perhaps, more impressive given the fact that women were arbitrarily given the score of 25 when they were clearly identified as housewives. This was based on the Census category of *Housekeeper, private household, living in.*

Table 8 also suggests that inequality is becoming greater over time.

TABLE 10
OCCUPATIONAL SCORE AVERAGES FOR MALES AND FEMALES IN JOKES WHERE A FEMALE DOMINATES A MALE

	1936	1972	Combined
Males	49 (N=8)	88 (N=13)	73 (N=21)
Females	55 (N=5)	64 (N=4)	59 (N=9)

Table 10 tests H_{11} for occupation. It indicates mixed results, in that the 1972 jokes would support the hypothesis, while the 1936 jokes as well as the figures for the overall sample are a basis for rejecting it.

In any case, like much of the other data in the study, this finding should be regarded as tentative for two reasons. First, the selection for female-dominating-male jokes reduces the numbers such that cell frequencies are quite small. Secondly, the standard deviation for these occupational means are in the vicinity of 32 points. Such wide variation makes it difficult to attribute significance, in any sense of the word, to the results.

As a point of comparison, a similar table was examined for M/F jokes: it showed males with consistently higher scores than females. (This table does not appear.)

TABLE 11
OVERALL STATUS OF MALES AND FEMALES COMPARED
FOR FEMALE-DOMINATING-MALE JOKES

Sex	1936		1972		Combined	
Status	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
Males	1	2	0	6	1	8
Females	3	1	7	1	10	2
					N = 11	10
					Total = 21	

Parts B and C of H_{11} were not tested directly. Original recording of the data made this cumbersome. Low cell frequencies were expected, also, making a collapsed table attractive. Therefore, an overall status judgment was used. Dichotomous in conception, it contains merely Low and High categories. The resulting table in effect tests both B and C.

Table 11 shows that this table too has low cell frequencies. The frequencies are clear enough so the table is not percentaged. The table indicates plainly for these few jokes that males have predominantly high overall status while females have low overall status.

This is true for the subsamples as well as the whole sample.

On overall status the hypothesis is supported.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The following is a relisting of the hypotheses which will make reading Table 12, a summary of the results, easier:

H_{1A}: The relative frequency of jokes with men dominant over women is greater than the relative frequency of jokes with women dominant over men.

H_{1B}: The percentage difference between jokes with men dominant over women and jokes with women dominant over men is smaller for 1972 than 1936.

H_2: The relative frequency of jokes with women dominant over men has increased over time.

H_3: The relative frequency of jokes with men dominant over women has decreased over time.

H_4: The relative frequency of men dominant over men has increased over time.

H_5: The relative frequency of women dominant over women has decreased over time.

H_6:   Women will be dominant over males as often as over females.

H_7:   Males will be dominant over females as often as over males.

H_8:   Men appear more often in jokes than do women.

H_9:   There will be more male characters in a joke than female characters.

H_{10}:   In each joke in which men's and women's occupations can be identified, men's occupations will be superior in rank to women's occupations.

H_{11}:   When women are dominant over men, the men will have superior status attributes such as:

        A.   occupation
        B.   majority-minority or minority
            rankings
        C.   other status attributes

TABLE 12
HYPOTHESES BY TEST RESULTS

Hypothesis	Support or Rejection
H_{1A}	Support-marginal
H_{1B}	Support-weak
H_2	Support-weak
H_3	Support-moderate
H_4	Reject
H_5	Support
H_6	Reject
H_7	Reject
H_8	Support-strong
H_9	Support-strong
H_{10}	Support-strong
H_{11}	(A) Support (B)(C) Support-weak

INTREPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

The Personal Mode

The weak support of Hypothesis H_{1A} is in part explained by the change over time. That is, H_{1A} is true for 1936 but false for 1972. Table 1 indicated an increase in F/M jokes and decrease in M/F jokes. This was expected and was the reason for formulating H_2 and H_3. However, it was expected that any change would be towards equality and not past it.

Why this change? Perhaps authors are more conscious about women due to the Women's Movement, or perhaps there is simply less prejudice. Unfortunately, in the present study there are no data that can tell us the cause. It would be nice to think this result is due to a change in the attitudes of the members of society and we are about to have an era of sexual equality. The data on the institutional mode make one doubt that this is the cause. Rather, it would seem that there is response to criticism from the Women's Movement and there are some changes, but not to sexual equality.

There is a clue to the nature of this change in that the M/F pattern has dropped considerably while the F/M pattern has changed little. This might be a response to

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criticism rather than a significant change in the posi-
tive image of women. One implication would thus be that
males are acting so as to avoid punishment rather than
to reassess their view of women. Further support for
this line of thinking comes from the rejection of H_4 and
support of H_5. That is, males are much less dominant over
time in both the M/F and M/M categories, and women are
only slightly more dominant over men and considerably
less (down 11%) dominant over the females. If the new
image were one of seeing women equal to men, one would
expect sizable increases in female dominance--both of
men and of women--but this is lacking.

The personal mode data also indicate that dominance
is much more a same-sex tool rather than a cross-sex
device. Table 3 demonstrates this for women and the
data for H_7 reveal a much larger difference (40%) in
the same-sex versus cross-sex dominance behavior of
males. The data also suggest that there is *not* a zero
sum game going on between men and women--men's losses
did not appreciably become women's gains. That is, the
total amount of dominance does not appear constant.

The Institutional Mode

In examining the institutional mode results, it can
be seen that a pattern almost opposite to that of the
personal mode is found. Here males have been gaining.

There are more jokes where males have superior occupational status. The inequality is greater in 1972 than in 1936. The average occupational score is much higher for males with the difference from females being rather considerable in 1972.

Why the smaller difference in 1936? There were many Hobo jokes in this collection; Hobos received lower (0) occupational scores than housewives with whom they were usually interacting. It is not known how much this effect influenced scores--but it certainly must have been a factor. Mention of Hobos and bums was rare in the Asimov collection. The point to be realized is that historical events influence social indicators.

The results for occupation are fairly consistent. Not only are men's occupations superior in rank, but they are more often reported. The occupational superiority is evident even in jokes that in the personal mode have females dominant over males. However, in the 1936 sub-sample this was not the case. No other explanation besides the Hobo cases comes to mind.

The major thrust of the results on the *institutional mode* is clear--women are more subordinate in occupational and other status rankings in 1972 than in 1936, and in 1936 they were already subordinate to men.

The decrease in occupational mentions and the lower occupational score in the two time periods is consistent with data of actual events; for example, there has been

a decline of women faculty members at universities between 1930 and 1970. The Carnegie Commission (1973: 191) states that women faculty have substantially inferior remuneration compared to men.

Other Data

The much higher frequency of appearance (see Tables 4 and 5) of males shows that for jokes humor is a man's world. Certainly, many jokes use the masculine pronouns (he, his, etc.) as a convention. But doesn't such lopsided exposure further sexism? This is not the place to argue the causes of sexism. Rather, here is some evidence of uneven exposure for those who would join such arguments. Those who do enter this controversy should also be aware that the ratio of males to females in our sample is declining. Could this be because of a heightened awareness of women and their vocalness about such occurrences?

* * * * *

Should the superiority of women in the personal mode and of men in the institutional mode be viewed as merely two different types of dominance? Or should one mode be acknowledged as superior? Remember, males enjoyed superior rankings in both modes in 1936; and in 1972, when women were dominant in the personal mode, men retained higher occupational status. The answer to our two questions is not clear. But since institutional

characteristics are longer lasting, one may wish to

characterize the entire situation as benefiting males.

CONCLUSION

The major thrust of the personal mode findings is
that in this mode we have crossed the point of equality
and females now dominate men more often than the reverse.
This has been mostly due to a decrease in male dominance.
Dominance overall has decreased showing it is not a
constant. Also, one should remember that personal domi-
nance is used more frequently as a same-sex device than
a cross-sex device.

The institutional mode findings are that males have
higher occupational rankings overall, higher occupational
and higher status rankings even when women are dominant
in the personal mode, and greater frequency of occupa-
tional mention. The inequality is larger for 1972 than
1936.

Since women are increasingly dominant in the personal
mode, and men increasingly dominant in the occupational
sphere, contrasts should become more apparent in the years
to come unless some change exercises counterinfluences.
Continued disparity should make an interesting socio-
logical case in the study of dominant-subordinate
relations.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Other hypotheses were formulated but could not be
tested for various reasons. Jokes were too brief to
have major roles for characters in any but the longest
jokes, which were too few to consider. Themes were
found to be too disparate and non-recurring to be able
to rank them.

Associations between domination pattern and domina-
tion method, domination method and sex distribution,
types of joke as categorized by the editors in placing
them in certain chapters with domination pattern and
domination method were all tested but produced tables
with too many empty cells.

However, there are some observations that can be
made from the data collected and analysis performed with
regard to these unreported hypotheses. The methods of
domination are many and diverse. Some 30 different
methods were encountered. Table 14 gives the methods
with the top seven ranks in each subsample.

In the entire sample there were five jokes classi-
fied as using the method of applying physical force.
All of these five were male over male jokes. Half of
the female-over-female jokes use the method of having

TABLE 13

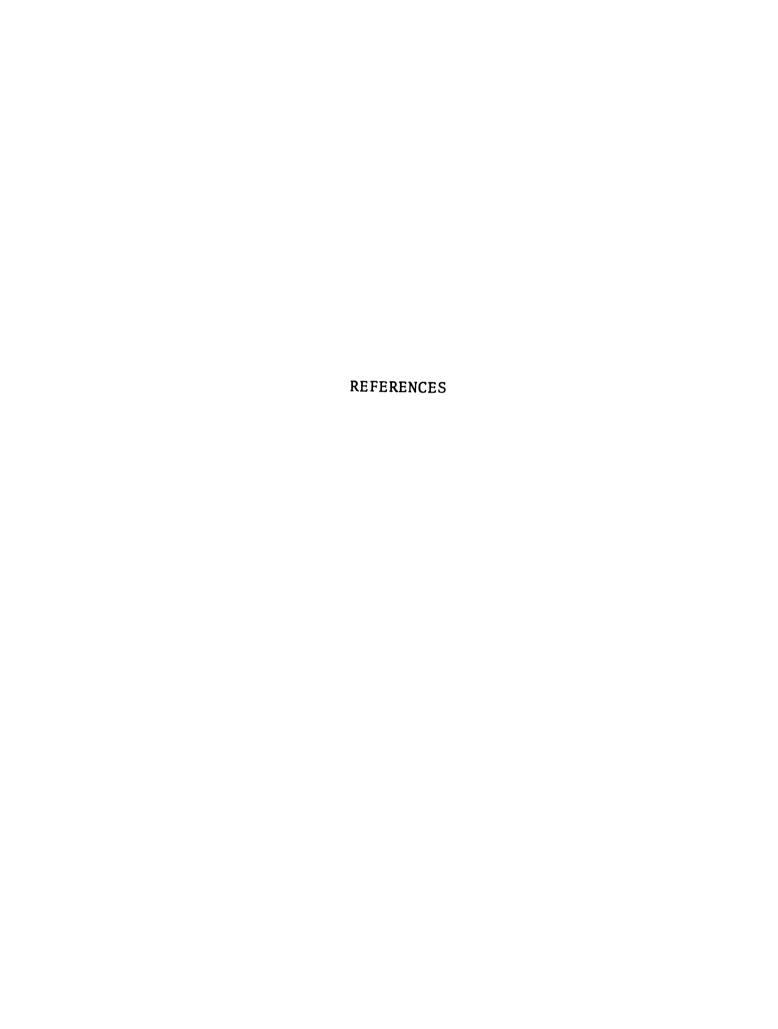### RANKS AND FREQUENCIES OF THE MOST OFTEN USED METHODS OF DOMINATION BY TIME PERIOD

Rank	Method	1936 Percent	Freq.	Rank	Method	1972 Percent	Freq.
1	last word	14%	20	1	last word	19%	29
2	insult	10%	14	2	insult	7%	11
3	other's ignorance	9%	13	3	one upmanship	7%	10
4	non-cooperation	6%	9	4	name calling or invective	5%	7
5	name calling or invective	4%	6	5	other's ignorance	4%	6
6	one upmanship	4%	6	6	non-cooperation	3%	4
7	authority figure	3%	5	7	turning tables	3%	4
all others		50%	73	all others		52%	83
TOTAL		100%	146	TOTAL		100%	154

TABLE 14
SEX DISTRIBUTION

Sex pattern	1936	1972	Combined
M	25	18	43
F	0	1	1
MM	52	62	114
MF	29	23	52
FF	4	4	8
MMM	11	9	20
MMF	7	12	19
MFF	3	3	6
FFF	0	0	0
MMMM	3	3	6
MMMF	0	4	4
MMFF	0	5	5
MFFF	0	0	0
FFFF	0	1	1
Other	12	9	21
Total	146	154	300

the last word, 25% of the male-over-female jokes do so, and only 17% of the male-over-male jokes do. Jokewriters seem to believe in the stereotype "women always have the last word."

The Barron study inspired a hypothesis on dialect-- women will be more often portrayed as speaking in a "feminine" form of dialect, e.g., "yes, dear; no, dear." But this occurred too infrequently to provide any evidence. However, using any kind of dialect, the ratio of not speaking in dialect shows a reversal over time. In 1936 females had a higher ratio than males, but in 1972 males had a higher ratio. This would indicate a minority position for women in 1972 if Barron's findings are used as a basis of judgment.

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