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Humor production in long-term romantic relationships: What the lack of moderation by sex reveals about humor's role in mating

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Abstract: This manuscript explores whether the associations between partner humor production and relationship satisfaction and humor's importance in romantic relationships are moderated by sex. Study 1 reports a meta-analysis ($k = 10$; $N = 2,167$) of the association between partner humor production (i.e., perceived; partner effects) and relationship satisfaction, and whether associations were moderated by participant sex. Contrary to predictions, partner humor production was more strongly associated to men's relationship satisfaction than women's satisfaction. Study 2 surveyed pairs of romantic partners ($N = 246$) regarding their production of humor, their appreciation of partner humor, and the importance of humor in their relationship. Results indicated no moderations by sex in the association between partner humor production and humor's importance in the relationship.

Keywords: humor, meta-analysis, relationship satisfaction, romantic relationship

1 Introduction

When seeking a new romantic partner, individuals often seek a mate with a good sense of humor while advertising their own sense of humor (Wilbur and Campbell 2011). In initial interactions between cross-sex strangers, couples that laugh together are more likely to report mutual romantic interest (Grammer and Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1990; Hall 2015). As in many courtship contexts, sex differences in partner preferences and behaviors complicate this general preference for humorous mates. Specifically, humor production in men is typically evaluated more positively by women, compared to the desirability of humor production in women as evaluated by men (Bressler et al. 2006; Lundy et al. 1998; Wilbur and Campbell 2011).

To explain this sex difference, researchers have turned to sexual strategies theory (SST; Buss and Schmitt 1993). The theory suggests that males and

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females should find different traits more appealing when seeking a short-term mate (e.g., a one-night stand) versus a long-term mate (e.g., marriage). If humor production during courtship is a way to assess the likelihood of long-term cooperation and compatibility, then women ought to favor humor more highly in potential long-term partners than in short-term partners – a tendency supported by past research (e.g., Bressler et al. 2006; Hone et al. 2015; Tornquist and Chiappe 2015). Thus, humor production has been conceptualized a reliable signal of long-term compatibility and enhanced likelihood of relationship success.

This multi-study investigation attempts to answer the question, are sex differences in the value placed on partner humor production when evaluating potential partners comparable to sex differences in the benefits conferred by humor in actual long-term romantic relationships? Specifically, the present investigation will attempt to answer three research questions: (i) Do women, more so than men, experience greater relationship satisfaction when their partners engage in more humor production? (ii) Do women, more so than men, perceive humor as more importance to the relationship when they have partners who produce more humor? (iii) Is the production-importance association mediated by appreciation of one's partner's sense of humor? By examining whether the benefits of partner humor production in heterosexual romantic relationship are moderated by sex, the present manuscript will contribute to both research on mate selection and research on the role of humor in long-term relationships.

2 Evolutionary theory and humor

Research on humor developed from theories of natural selection (Darwin 1859) focus on its role in increasing the chances of human survival. Traits that help organisms survive and procreate are more likely to be passed down than traits that do not. From this perspective, humor is adaptive for survival of pre-human ancestors in as much that it enhanced pair bonding, eased social interactions, increased group cohesion, and fosters inclusion among conspecifics (Caron 2002; Owren and Bachorowski 2003). What might be called laughter in primates typically signals playful intent or invitation to interact in a non-serious way (Provine 2000). Thus, physical social play likely preceded play in the realm of words or ideas (Caron 2002). Laughter, particularly shared laughter, may serve a similar function by facilitating interpersonal relationships (Mehu and Dunbar 2008). Thus, humor, when viewed as a naturally selected trait,

offers the possessor several advantages to survival: it increases inclusion and bonding and decreases the risk of exclusion and isolation.

Research on humor developed from theories of sexual selection has focused on what humor signals in the humor producer. Due to greater investment in procreation and parenting, the female sex limits mating opportunities in many species (Trivers 1972). For human males, mating can result in reproduction without further involvement in child rearing. Human female reproduction is substantially costlier due to the demands of pregnancy and weaning. This creates pressure for females to choose a mate who will increase the likelihood of survival of the offspring and will provide more paternal investment. Therefore, traits in males that are attractive to females are those most likely to meet those criteria.

Drawing from Miller's work (2000; Kaufman et al. 2008), research (e.g., Bressler and Balshine 2006; Bressler et al. 2006) suggests that humor is a sexually selected trait that is an honest signal of intelligence and creativity produced by males to be evaluated by females. When a trait offers benefits to or serves the needs of one sex over the other, given unequal costs involved in reproduction, weaning, and parenting, it should demonstrate both a sex difference in frequency of display during courtship and difference in reported or desirability in the opposite sex. However, there is limited evidence that humor signals intelligence or creativity (for review see Storey 2003). Humorous male suitors are considered *less* rather than more intelligent (Bressler and Balshine 2006; Lundy et al. 1998). Senko and Fyffe (2010) found a negative relationship between perceived humorousness and intelligence when females evaluated males' pick-up lines. Using several measures of humor production and intelligence, Hall (2015) found no association between humor production and intelligence or creativity, either as self-reported or as perceived by others.

Although evidence linking humor production to intelligence is weak, there is consistent support for sex differences in the production of humor in courtship favoring men (Hall 2015; Owren and Bachorowski 2003) and the desirability of humor production in men as reported by women, compared to the desirability of humor production in women as reported by men (Bressler et al. 2006; Hone et al. 2015; Lundy et al. 1998; Tornquist and Chiappe 2015; Wilbur and Campbell 2011). Because these two findings confirm the central premise – although not the mechanism – of arguments developed from theories of sexual selection, they create an unresolved challenge to explain why such sex differences might exist. Alternatives to Miller's (2000) original argument have been proposed, including humor production as a signal of warmth (Wilbur and Campbell 2011), extroversion (Hall 2015), and social skills (Senko and Fyffe 2010). These traits are more consistent with the characterization of humor as a trait selected for the purpose of social bonding.

3 Sexual strategies theory: Humor and long-term versus short-term mating

Sexual strategies theory (Buss and Schmitt 1993) suggests that males and females should find different traits more appealing when seeking a short-term mate (e.g., a one-night stand) versus a long-term mate (e.g., marriage). When seeking short-term mates, women are thought to prefer traits indicative of high quality genes in men, but when seeking long-term mates, women are thought to prefer traits indicative of good parenting and long-term mating success. Tornquist and Chiappe (2015) suggest that humor production during courtship is a way to assess the likelihood of long-term cooperation and compatibility. In finding someone who shares that sense of humor, many joint endeavors involved in long-term relationships and parenting may be more pleasant and cooperative. Several studies have made the distinction between short- and long-term relationships when evaluating humor production in courtship. Bressler et al. (2006) found that women preferred humor production in men in long-term relationships compared to short-term ones. Hone et al. (2015) report the sex difference in preference for a humor-producing partner favoring women was greater in long-term and committed dating conditions compared to short-term mating conditions. Similarly, Tornquist and Chiappe (2015) found that when seeking a long-term relationship, women more favorably rated humor production in men than did men in women. For short-term relationships, sex differences in preferences were not detected (Tornquist and Chiappe 2015). In sum, women favor humor production in men particularly when seeking a long-term partnership, particularly when the humor is warm and positive (Didonato et al. 2013). As predicted by SST, women should value warmth, cooperation, and social facility in men, particularly in the context of long-term pairing, because such traits would engender a more satisfying relationship. This leads to the question, is humor production associated with such benefits in long-term relationships?

4 Humor in long-term romantic relationships

Classic research on the role of humor in committed romantic relationships confirms the value of humor to marriage (e.g., Lauer et al. 1990; Ziv and Gadish 1989). The reported benefits are consistent with a natural selection-based conceptualization of humor as tool for facilitating bonding, fostering

inclusion, and signaling playfulness or good cheer (Betcher 1981). A recent meta-analysis suggests that although positive styles of humor are associated with relationship satisfaction, humor evaluation and relational humor show the strongest associations with relationship satisfaction (Hall 2017). Interpreted through the lens of humor as a sign of compatibility and cooperation, it makes sense that partners who co-create humor, who share humor with one another, and who evaluate one another as having a good sense of humor would be more satisfied in their relationships. Given that research in courtship contexts has consistently found that women value the production of humor by men more than men value the production of humor by women, this sex difference might translate into a greater benefit of men's humor production for women in terms of relationship satisfaction in long-term relationships. If humor production by men is valued during mate selection because it is a sexually selected sign of relationship compatibility and success, then women, compared to men, in long-term relationships should benefit more in terms of satisfaction from their partners' humor production. Thus:

4.1 H1

In long-term heterosexual romantic relationships, the association between one's partner's humor production and one's own relationship satisfaction will be stronger for women than men.

In both courtship and long-term relationship contexts, partners can place more or less value on any given partner trait or characteristic in regard to its importance to the success of the relationship. Before a relationship starts and after it has been established for years, the importance placed on a trait or characteristic is pertinent to understanding its role in a relationship. In mate selection studies, humor's desirability (Bressler and Balshine 2006; Lundy et al. 1998) or relative priority given a partner budget (Hone et al. 2015) is indicative of its importance. Similarly, in long-term romantic relationships, couples who believe that humor is an important part of their relationship tend to be more satisfied in marriage (Lauer et al. 1990). If humor is not considered important, then it is unlikely to be a critical component of long-term pair bonding or relationship success. To explore whether sex differences in preferences for humor production in courtship translate to actual long-term relationships, the moderation of the association between the importance of humor and partner humor production will be explored. Does humor play a more important role in the relationship for one partner when the other partner produces more humor? Furthermore, is that association moderated by sex? To test whether the

tendencies reported in mate-selection contexts apply to long-term relationships, we predict:

4.2 H2

In long-term heterosexual romantic relationships, men's humor production will be more positively associated with the importance of humor as reported by women, compared to the association between women's humor production and the importance of humor as reported by men.

Finally, the present investigation will explore whether the link between humor production and the value of humor is mediated by the appreciation of humor by one's partner. The value of a joke does not lie in its objectively humorous qualities, or even the intention of the joker, but in the reception it evokes (Hall and Sereno 2010). In courtship contexts, having a partner who appreciates one's own sense of humor appears to be equally valued by men and women (Bressler et al. 2006; Wilbur and Campbell 2011), particularly when that partner is able to produce humor (Tornquist and Chiappe 2015). Additionally, mutual laughter, a sign of humor appreciation, is a predictor of romantic relationship interest for both men and women (Hall 2015). Therefore:

4.3 H3

In long-term heterosexual romantic relationships, the association between partner humor production and the importance of humor in the relationship will be mediated by the degree to which one partner appreciates the other partner's humor production.

5 Overview of studies

The inherently dyadic nature of humor in romantic relationships requires a methodological and statistical approach that accounts for partners' interdependence and non-independence of samples. To test study hypotheses, partner effects and/or partner perceptions were measured and moderations of these effects by participant sex were tested. Study 1 uses a subset of 10 studies from Hall's (2017) meta-analysis to test for sex moderations in the association between partner perceptions and partner effects and relationship satisfaction to test H1. Study 2 tests H2 and H3 by examining the partner effects of humor

production on importance and mediating role of appreciation on humor for couples in long-term romantic relationships ($N = 246$).

5.1 Study 1: Humor production meta-analysis

5.1.1 Study 1 method

The first study used a subset of studies that were part of a larger meta-analysis (Hall 2017) on the association between humor and relationship satisfaction. Methods of study identification and selection are reported therein. The present investigation identified the 17 unique effect sizes from 16 studies measuring humor production. From that group of effect sizes, 11 reported findings separately for men and women. One study included only women respondents and was removed. All measures of humor production were self-reported. Manuscripts were published between 1988 and 2013, and all but one study (i.e., Johari 2004) were from peer-reviewed publications. Five effect sizes were calculated for partner perceived humor production. Seven effect sizes were calculated for partner effects, which is the association between one partner's humor production on the other partner's relationship satisfaction. All studies that reported partner effects were from dyadic samples.

Effect sizes and standard errors were corrected for the artifact of unreliability. Artifact correction permits the estimation of effect sizes as they would appear under ideal circumstances (Lipsey and Wilson 2001). Effect sizes were weighted by the inverse of the sampling error variance. Combined effect sizes were then evaluated for heterogeneity. Effects were considered homogenous when the variance could be attributed to sampling error alone (i.e., Q statistic was non-significant). When effect sizes were heterogeneous (i.e., significant Q statistic), the hypothesized sex difference was explored.

5.1.2 Study 1 results

The final sample of 10 effect sizes included 2,167 participants (51% female). Participants were on average 32.3 years of age ($M_{sample\ range} = 20$ to 47 yrs.). Sample race/ethnicity was reported in five samples, and 36.4% of participants were non-white. All samples reported marital status and 41.85% of participants were married. The average length of relationship was reported in eight samples, and was 8.9 yrs. ($M_{sample\ range} = 1.8$ –29.5 yrs.).

The weighted mean effect size for partner-perceived humor production was $r = 0.334$. The sex of participant interaction effect was not significant, $Q = 0.61$, $df = 1$, $p = ns$. When men reported their partners' production of humor, it was positively associated with their own satisfaction, $r = 0.341$, $k = 5$, $N = 479$. When women reported their partners' production of humor, it was positively associated with their own satisfaction, $r = 0.329$, $k = 5$, $N = 490$. There was no sex difference in this association, thus the results did not support H1.

The weighted mean effect size for humor production's partner effects (i.e., the effect of one partner's humor production on the other partner's relationship satisfaction) was $r = 0.152$. The sex of participant interaction effect was significant, $Q = 5.64$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$. When men reported their own humor production, the association with their female partners' relationship satisfaction was $r = 0.077$, $k = 7$, $N = 930$. When women reported their own humor production, the association with their male partners' relationship satisfaction was $r = 0.231$, $k = 7$, $N = 930$. These results were in the opposite direction of H1.

5.1.3 Study 1 discussion

Study 1 did not support H1. The moderation analyses suggest that when humor production is perceived in partners, both men and women are similarly satisfied. That is, the more humor production perceived in one's partner, the more satisfied a romantic partner tends to be, regardless of sex. The partner effect of women's humor production on men's satisfaction was greater than the partner effect for men's production of humor on women's satisfaction. Compared to men, when women self-report more humor production, they tend to have more satisfied partners. This is directly in contrast to the value women place on men's humor production during courtship, and is the opposite of H1's prediction. Whether humor is perceived in one's partner or reported by one's partner (i.e., partner effect), men's humor production is not associated with more partner relationship satisfaction than women's humor production.

5.2 Study 2: APIM of humor production, appreciation, and importance

5.2.1 Study 2 method

Procedures: Over several semesters, respondents were solicited by asking students in an introductory communication course at a mid-sized private university

in the Western US to request that their parents or other married adults to complete the instrument over a holiday weekend. No course credit was offered in exchange for a completed survey, and no identifying information was collected. All procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board.

Participants: One-hundred and twenty-three heterosexual couples participated. The average age was 36 (range 18–69), and the respondents had been in their relationship for an average of 12.2 years. Eighty-nine percent of couples were married and living together, and 11% of couples were living together, but not married. Participants were 60% Caucasian, 18% Asian American, 13% Latino, and 2% African American, and 7% Arabic American and other. The median highest level of education completed was vocational school/community college.

Materials: *Humor production* was measured using a four-item scale, wherein participants reported on the frequency with which they engaged in positive humor in private (i.e., silly behavior; humor unique to your relationship; G-rated or PG rated jokes or stories; humorous remarks or puns) (Hall and Sereno 2010). These items were scaled on a 5-point Likert-type scale (“Never” to “All of the time”). Participants were also asked to rate how much they *appreciated* their partner using of each of the same four types of humor on a 5-point scale (“Very negatively” to “Very positively”). For example, participants were asked how much they appreciated their partner’s humorous puns or remarks from very negatively to very positively. The four items assessing the *importance of humor* in relationship (e.g., “How important is the use of humor to your satisfaction in the relationship?” “Overall, how do you judge the effect of the use of humor in your relationship?”) were assessed using a 5-point scale (“Very negatively” to “Very positively”).

Initial reliability tests yielded good results (i.e., *positive humor production* $\alpha = 0.71$; *partner appreciation* $\alpha = 0.87$; *importance of humor* $\alpha = 0.88$). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in Mplus (Muthen and Muthen 1998-2007) was conducted to determine whether the measures were a good fit to their latent constructs. Results indicate that the three factor model reported a significant χ^2 value, but the χ^2/df rule-of-thumb was below the recommended value of five, $\chi^2/df = 3.8$, and the CFI showed a good fit (i.e., 0.97) (see Table 1 for means and standard deviations).

5.2.2 Study 2 results

Once the measurement model was found acceptable, an Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) for distinguishable dyads was constructed

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations for Study 2 (N = 256).

Items	Men		Women	
	M	SD	M	SD
Positive Humor Production	4.27	1.26	3.89	1.02
Appreciation of Partner Humor	4.00	1.25	4.51	1.25
Importance of Humor	3.91	1.66	4.06	1.37

Note: All responses on 5-pt scales.

(Figure 1) in Mplus. A hybrid model, combining the measurement model and the path model was used, and error terms of all paired study variables were allowed to covary to account for non-independence of samples (Kenny et al. 2006). The model tested sex differences in the association between partner humor production and the importance of humor in romantic relationships, and whether that association was mediated by the degree of appreciation of the partner’s humor. The model was constructed with importance of men humor as the dependent variable

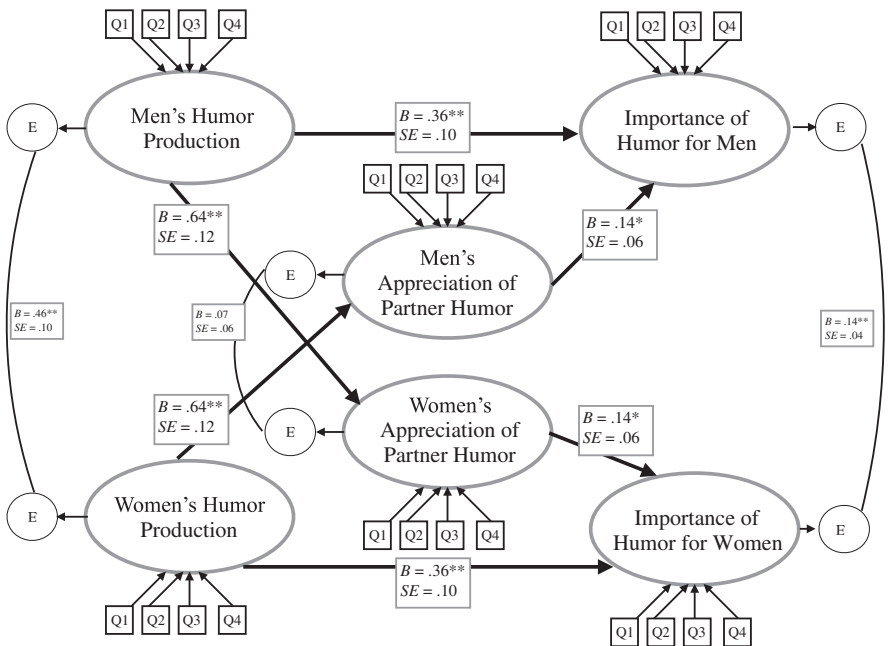


Figure 1: Dyadic humor study.

and appreciation of partners' humor as the mediating variable (H3), and partner humor production as the independent variable (Figure 1). To test for sex differences (H2), a χ^2 difference test was used (Kenny et al. 2006). If constraining the paths to be equivalent produced a significant difference in model fit, then sex differences could be assumed.

The first two paths tested the association between men's production of humor and women's appreciation of their partners' humor, and women's production of humor and men's appreciation of their partners' humor (i.e., partner effects). Both paths were positive and significant, and no change in χ^2 was found when paths were constrained to be equivalent, χ^2 diff = 0.48, $df=1$, $p=ns$. The second pair of paths was between one's own humor production and one's own importance of humor. These paths tested actor effects, which were not hypothesized, but are important for constructing APIMs (Kenny et al. 2006). Both paths were significant, and no χ^2 change was found when paths were constrained to be equivalent, χ^2 diff = 0.81, $df=1$, $p=ns$. Then, two paths between women's appreciation of men's humor and women's own importance, and men's appreciation of women's humor and men's own importance were estimated. Both paths were significant. No change in χ^2 was found when paths were constrained to be equivalent, χ^2 diff = 0.97, $df=1$, $p=ns$. The direct paths between one partner's humor production and the other partner's importance of humor were then estimated, but neither were significant. To test H3, two indirect effects were estimated using bootstrapping: men's production \rightarrow women's appreciation \rightarrow women's importance; women's production \rightarrow men's appreciation \rightarrow men's importance. The indirect effects of both paths were identical for both men and women: $\beta=0.13$, $SE=0.06$, $p=0.033$. This did not support H2, which explored a moderation of this association by sex.

5.2.3 Study 2 discussion

Study 2 found that partner humor production did not show sex differences in its association with the importance of humor in the relationship for the other partner. This did not support H2. Whether the joker or audience was male or female, the more one partner produced positive humor, the more likely the other partner appreciated it. When one partner's humor was appreciated by the other partner (i.e., partner effect), the other partner valued humor more in the relationship. The indirect effect was significant, which supported the mediation predicted by H3, but this association was not moderated by participant sex (H2). Thus, when one partner produces positive humor it is associated with valuing

humor more in the relationship by the other partner, in part, because of the positive reception of that humor receives.

6 Discussion

Sexual strategies theory (Buss and Schmitt 1993) predicts that in the context of long-term mating, men and women face similar adaptive challenges: finding a partner who will commit and share a good relationship. Partner humor production, as a facilitator of bonding and a source of joy and good cheer (Betcher 1981; Caron 2002), is a trait that appears to offer similar benefits for both men and women in long-term romantic relationships. The present investigation suggests that men and women experience similar benefits in regard to their partners' humor production.

Study 1 found a moderately sized effect ($r = 0.334$) for the association between partner perceived humor production and relationship satisfaction. This effect was not moderated by sex. Additionally, the effect size between one partner's humor production and the other partner's satisfaction (i.e., the partner effect) was moderated by sex, but in an unexpected direction. Specifically, when women report more humor production, they were more likely to have partners who report higher relationship satisfaction ($r = 0.231$), compared to women's satisfaction when men report more humor production ($r = 0.077$). This moderation could be interpreted as men stand to benefit more than women in terms of relationship satisfaction by having partners who produce more humor. Study 2 found that appreciation of partner humor mediated the association between partner humor production and its importance to the relationship, and this indirect association was not moderated by sex. This is consistent with Hone et al. (2015) and others (e.g., Bressler et al. 2006) who have found that humor appreciation is equally valued in long-term partners by men and women. Overall, the present investigation suggests that humor production and appreciation may contribute to a satisfying relationship similarly for both men and women.

These results, however, are in contrast with frequently reported sex differences in mate preferences for humor production in the context of long-term relationships. From the perspective of SST (Buss and Schmitt 1993), traits that offer solutions to the challenges of long-term pair bonding should be valued similarly for men and women when choosing partners for marriage. Indeed, the value placed on emotional stability, kindness, and a

pleasing disposition for marriage partners shows marked similarity across cultures and a notable lack of sex differences (Yong and Li 2016). Perhaps sex differences in the desirability of humor production reported in past studies suggest that humor production is not among the characteristics that make for a pleasing and committed long-term relationship for both men and women. Yet, decades of research suggest quite the opposite (Hall 2017), and the results of the present investigation show that these benefits are not moderated by sex. Another interpretation drawn from SST would be that humor production is similar to men's preference for physical attractiveness and women's preference for status and protection in long-term relationships, which both continue to show sex differences even after committing to a long-term relationship (Yong and Li 2016). However, there is little evidence that men perceive humorous women as being more physical attractive in general, or in comparison to how women rate men (Bressler et al. 2006; Hone et al. 2015; Tornquist and Chiappe 2015). As one final possibility, women's reported preference for humor producing men for long-term relationships could be due to its association with status (Kaufman et al. 2008). Given humor production's null (or negative) association with intelligence (Hall 2015; Lundy et al. 1998; Storey 2003), this explanation is wanting. Yet, it is conceivable that women, more than men, associate humor production in potential partners as indicative of possessing social status and/or more resources. This untested explanation would be consistent with both the sex difference in long-term partner preferences for humor production and with SST.

7 Limitations

Although this study offered evidence of a lack of sex difference in the benefit of partner humor production in long-term romantic relationships, it relied upon self-reported humor production. As Hall (2017) points out, there are no studies to date that have used third-party ratings of humor production in relation to relationship satisfaction. If humor production is thought to be an important trait in explaining both courtship and long-term marital success, a more objective measure of it is needed to bolster claims. The present investigation is also limited by focusing on null findings in the case of sex moderations. Although it is impossible to dismiss the possibility of Type II error, the use of secondary data with large samples sizes in Study 1 should mitigate this concern.

8 Alternative explanations and future directions

The results of the present investigation, particularly the significant sex moderation found in partner effects, suggest that women are over-valuing humor production in men and men are under-valuing humor production in women when choosing a long-term partner. This claim of relative value comes from research on participants who have limited experience in long-term romantic relationships. Asking undergraduate students to project what they would value in long-term partners is a noted limitation of past research (e.g., Bressler et al. 2006; Hone et al. 2015; Tornquist and Chiappe 2015). Perhaps a lack of experience or knowledge about what makes a long-term relationship function contributes to students' inaccurate estimation of the value of humor production. Below, an alternative, courtship-specific explanation provides another account for why sex differences in partner preferences during courtship do not match up with the lack of sex differences in correlates of long-term relationship satisfaction and importance.

The traditional sexual script is a cognitive conceptualization of the roles men and women play during all stages of courtship (Gagnon 1990). The script follows that men are more interested in and pursuant of sex than women, and the script calls for men to initiate courtship and to take the lead during initial interactions (Eaton and Rose 2011; Hall et al. 2010). The script is highly tied to traditional gender roles and with trait gender (Eaton and Rose 2011). Outside the context of courtship, creating humor is associated with higher trait masculinity (Ehrenberg 1995). In married relationships, trait masculinity is associated with husbands making more jokes, and trait femininity is associated with wives laughing at those jokes (Honeycutt and Brown 1998). In fact, in mixed sex environments that are not courtship-specific, the pattern of men playing the role of joker and women the role of evaluator does not emerge (Mehu and Dunbar 2008). The traditional sexual script would suggest that in courtship contexts, but not all contexts, men might produce more humor to play the masculine role of pursuer and entertainer, and women may play the feminine role of evaluator and appreciator of men's pursuit. In doing so, both sexes display characteristics thought desirable by the opposite sex according to the traditional script. This adherence to the script might result in sex differences in self-reported partner preferences and behavior, wherein men want an appreciative (i.e., feminine acting) woman and women want a humor producing (i.e., masculine acting) man.

Future research might test this explanation by examining whether sex differences in partner preferences are tied to gender ideology. Perhaps accounting for individual differences in trait gender (i.e., masculinity/femininity) or the traditional flirting style (Hall et al. 2010) might account for sex differences in

partner preferences for humor production. If feminine or traditional females engage in more humor appreciation and prefer men who are humor producers, and masculine or traditional men prefer appreciative but not humor producing women, then this sex difference in partner preference might have its origins not in evolved sexual selection, but in the culturally agreed-upon traditional sexual script. This explanation would be consistent with the positive, bonding effects of humor in long-term relationships for both sexes, while allowing for the stated partner preferences to show sex differences, which would then be associated with individual differences in gender ideology.

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