

Sarcasm Used by Couples in the U.K. and U.S.: A Cultural Comparison

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Introduction

- Effective communication is key to relationship well-being. Communication quality can vary depending on several factors, including:
 - Individual differences in **communication style** (e.g., direct or indirect) and **gender**.
 - Cultural differences (e.g., **between vs. within countries**).
- However, little is known about the way in which these factors affect a more ambiguous style of communication: **sarcasm**. Although sarcasm (like humor) might also bring a sense of novelty and spontaneity to relationships, research needs to first explore how the above factors affect sarcasm use in relationships.

Current Study:

- To examine the association between culture (e.g., UK vs US) and gender (men vs women) on use of sarcasm in couples
- To examine whether this association is mediated by openness to emotional expression (e.g., comfort with being direct about one's emotions in relationships)

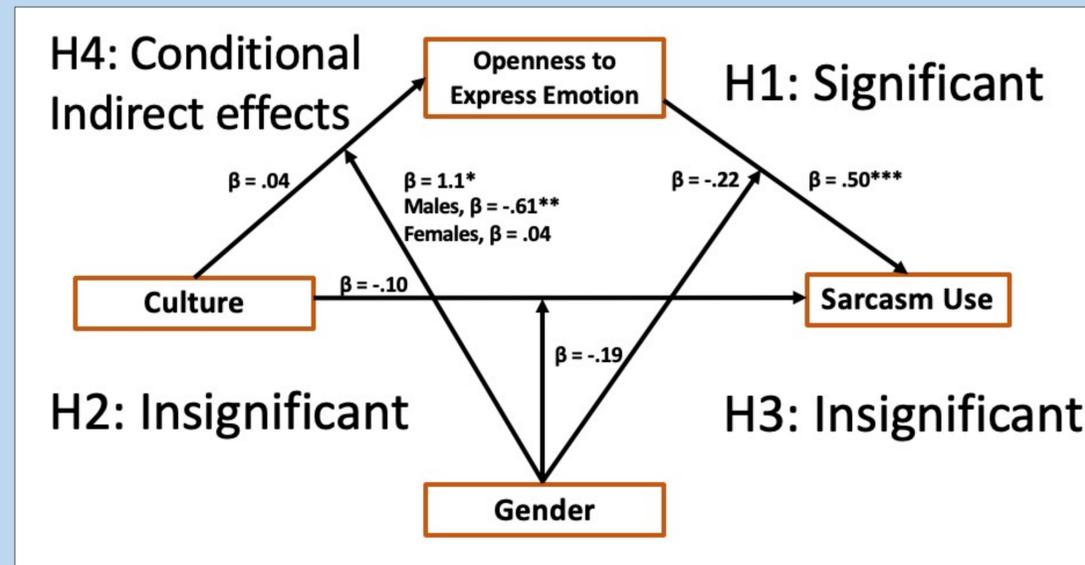
Hypotheses:

- H1: Partners who are less open to emotional expression will use more sarcasm in their relationship.
- H2: U.K. partners will report using more sarcasm than U.S. partners.
- H3: Men will report using more sarcasm than women in both cultures.
- H4: UK men will report using more sarcasm due to greatest discomfort with direct emotional expression.

Methods

- Individuals in romantic relationships completed an online survey via Amazon M-Turk with several self-report measures:
 - Sarcasm use (Sarcasm Self-Report Scale)
 - Humor use (Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale)
 - Openness to express emotion (Ambivalence Over Emotional Expression Questionnaire)
- All items asked participants to reflect on these behaviors in their current relationship.
- Participants:** 88 individuals in relationships, with majority self-identifying as straight, White, middle-aged, and in a relationship for at least 10 years.

Results



Note: * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Data Analytic Strategy: Moderated mediation was used to test whether (a) culture and gender interact to affect sarcasm use and (b) whether this association is mediated by openness to emotional expression.

H1: The less comfortable participants were with expressing their emotions openly, the more likely they were to use sarcasm.

H2: In isolation culture did not have direct effects on sarcasm use.

H3: In isolation gender did not have direct effects on sarcasm use.

H4: Culture was indirectly & negatively associated with sarcasm use for **MEN** only.

- ❖ No differences in sarcasm use between U.K. and U.S. women.
- ❖ U.S. men reported using significantly more sarcasm in their relationships compared to U.K. men.
- ❖ This association was explained by U.S. men's tendency to report being *less* comfortable with open emotional expression.

Discussion

Why do our findings say that Americans are more sarcastic than the British?

Could be true... OR could be:

- Using only self-report methods provides us with only part of the story
- How people rate themselves on self-report is **NOT** the same as how other people rate them through behavioral observation
- Self-report = individual's subjective experiences
- Behavioral observation = actual communication behavior

Gender norms & Cultural norms have powerful yet inherent influences on how we think and perceive our behavior.

Future research should:

- Incorporate both self-report & behavioral observation of the couple
- Explore other motivations for why sarcasm may differ by gender
- Use larger and more diverse sample

Conclusion

- Sarcasm = can be used to avoid the vulnerability that accompanies direct emotional expression. This provides us with initial insight into a potential role of sarcasm in romantic relationships.
- Beginning to understand the association between culture, gender, openness to express emotion and sarcasm use: **gender & culture interact alongside openness to express emotion to impact sarcasm use.**

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