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Who resorts to sarcasm at work - A study on power, gender and personality

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Abstract

The current study investigates if power enhances the inclination to use sarcastic irony in a hypothetical work setting. In addition to gender, trait dominance is included as a potential moderator. Results suggest that high situational power increased inclination to use sarcastic irony, and that males were more inclined to use sarcastic irony compared to females. Results do not suggest that trait dominance had an effect on the inclination to use irony.

1.0 Introduction

Several authors have in the last decade demonstrated how having a sense of power can induce a range of behaviours in the workplace (Tannen, 1995; Huang, Galinsky, Gruenfeld & Guillory, 2010). More specifically, the relation between power and language often point to the way in which authority figures, such as managers, misbehave when feeling powerful. This may be speaking more freely, feeling less inhibited and disregarding others' opinions (Bendahan, Zehnder, Pralong & Antonakis, 2015; Tost, Gino & Larrick, 2013; Ferguson, Ormiston & Moon, 2010). Building on previous studies, this master thesis seeks to explore *if power makes people more inclined to use sarcastic irony in a workplace setting*. The purpose of this is to see under which conditions individuals are prone to misuse their role as an authority figure. Investigating the consequences of social dynamics at work is important because it highlights the subtler differences of being in an environment with people who feel powerful. The road to corrupt authority might be short, even though the individual derogating others might not be aware of it (DeCelles, DeRue, Margolis & Ceranic, 2012). We expect to see a difference between high- and low power situations regarding the use of sarcasm. Based on previous research, gender should also have an influence on the behaviour (Drucker, Fein, Bergerbest & Giora, 2014; Colston & Lee, 2004). Dominance as a personality trait have also been included, to see if certain personality constructs have something to add to the explanation. We address each of these hypotheses in the following sections. The paper starts with a review of relevant literature on power, semantics, personality, power and gender differences. Following sections address methodological considerations, results of the statistical analyses, discussion of findings, limitations of the study and future avenues of research to pursue. Conclusively, the implications of the findings are discussed.

2.0 Theoretical background

The following section will review literature in the domain of power, power bases and the corruptive effects of power. Power's effect on behaviour is discussed, with examples of both positive and negative outcomes. Finally, the use and meaning of irony and sarcasm will be discussed, with relevant literature addressing gender differences in this regard. These aspects cover the relevant literature for this study, and provides the reader with appropriate background information to understand and critically assess the findings.

2.1 Defining power

In general, power can be thought of as control over others (Fiske, 1993), and we typically think of some people as having or not having power. However, it may be more accurate to think of individual power as a continuum relative to the power of others. Hence, "power is a property of a social relation; it is not an attribute of the actor" (Emerson, 1962, p. 32).

More elaborate definitions of power vary according to the unit of analysis (e.g. individual, group, society), outcome of interest (e.g. organisational performance) and the guiding question (e.g. who has it or where is it located). Some definitions focus on the actor's intentions whereas others focus on the target's response (Keltner, Gruenfeldt & Anderson, 2003). Nevertheless, the dominant explanation of power is *the individual's capacity to provide or withhold resources and administer punishment in order to alter the states of others*. These resources and punishments can be material or social (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Keltner, Gruenfeldt & Anderson, 2003; Fiske, 1993). The power to control others thus resides in controlling things that others' value. It may therefore make sense to think about the concept of dependence, and power as residing implicitly in others' dependence - "the power of A over B is equal to, and based upon, the dependence of B upon A" (Emerson, 1962, p. 33).

Power is somewhat different from related concepts such as status, authority and dominance. Status somewhat determines the allocation of resources but differs from power in that an individual can have power without status and status without power. Authority is legitimate power in a formalised structure, but power can also exist without this formal structure. Dominance is behaviour that aims to achieve power, but power can be obtained without dominance (for instance the cooperative leader who obtains power through trust and cooperation).

Therefore, status, authority and dominance are rather potential determinants of power (Keltner, Gruenfeldt & Anderson, 2003).

2.2 Power bases

Power can be divided into five distinct types that describe the source of power and the actor's relation to the recipient. It should be noted that power is rarely based on only one source and is rather a combination of several (Lippitt, Polansky & Rosen, 1952; French & Raven, 1959). The five power types, or bases, are reward, coercive, legitimate, referent and expert power. Reward power illustrates the actor's ability to distribute rewards to recipients and can be performed by increasing a positive factor or decreasing a negative factor. Sustaining this type of power is reliant on the reward being delivered as promised (Lippitt, Polansky, & Rosen, 1952). Coercive power stems from the expectation that nonconformity to the actor's influence will result in punishment, and is similar to reward power as they both refer to an actor's ability to influence a recipient's wellbeing. The difference is that recipients respond differently when seeking to gain reward or relieve suffering than when trying to avoid punishment (French & Raven, 1959). Legitimate power on the other hand is based on internalised beliefs and values about the right to execute power over others and that recipients has an obligation to accept this influence. This is usually what we think of when referring to managers in organisations. Cultural values are a common source of legitimate power, and can be based on age, caste, gender, and physical characteristics. Social structure is another basis for legitimate power (French & Raven, 1959). For example, older people have in some cultures legitimate power over younger people because of their age. In a less salient matter, referent power takes place when the person exposed to power wants to, or identifies him/herself with another person or group. The more someone want to be identified with something, the more referent power does the other part have. An example of this is illustrated by the fashion industry. By using desirable front figures, people often buy the product to identify with this person. Referent power is thus based on identification (French & Raven, 1959). Finally, expert power is based on the perception that someone has a skill or expertise that others do not. The expert is seen as having knowledge in specific areas and thus are able to influence the recipient's cognitive structure. Because the power is limited to a distinct expertise, exerting power outside the expertise area will reduce the expert power (French & Raven, 1959). Expert and

referent power exerted by leaders have been found to be positively associated with compliance *and* satisfaction by employees. Legitimate power was also positively associated with compliance, but negatively associated with satisfaction (Rahim, 1989).

2.3 The impact of power on behaviour

Power evidently has an influence on social behaviour. The approach inhibition theory argues that power impacts our behaviour in an integrative way. High and low social power leads to some social consequences. These consequences can be further divided into sub-groups: the behavioural approach system and the behavioural inhibition system (Keltner, Gruenfeldt & Anderson, 2003; Carver, 1994).

The behavioural approach system determines behaviour related to gender, food, safety achievement, aggression and social attachment. Rewards and opportunities induce these processes, which guide individuals' pursuit of goals in order to reap rewards. Activation of this system cause movement towards a goal.

The behavioural inhibition system involves affective states such as anxiety and evaluation of punishment contingencies to these states occurring. This system is more like an alarm system, activated through uncertainty, threat and punishment. As such, the system restricts movement towards goals.

In terms of high versus low social power, this might mean that people who feel powerful tend to experience more approach related behaviours and affections. Additionally, they act in a more disinhibited way, making them more prone to speak their mind and display behaviour deemed less socially acceptable. This stems from the lack of nervous feelings which normally restrain certain behaviours. People who feel powerless are more likely to feel negative moods and affections, making them more prone to inhibit their behaviours and restrain themselves to act in congruence with others (Keltner, Gruenfeld & Anderson, 2003). For instance, people high in power state of mind are more likely than people in low power state of mind to express their true attitudes and opinions (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002). In an organisational setting, this can have significant influences as a lot of work is centred around exchanging professional opinions and discussing matters with others.

A study by Anderson and Galinsky (2006) on power, optimism and risk-taking found that those primed with high power were more risk-seeking in their

actions, more optimistic in their perceptions of risk and took more risks in negotiations. In line with Keltner, Gruenfeld and Anderson's (2003) behavioural approach system, the authors argue that individuals high on power are so focused on outcomes and payoffs that they do not think about the consequences of their actions. They are more confident that they can get away with a range of behaviours deemed less socially acceptable due to less inhibitions. Thus, powerful individuals will be more prone to violate ethical and social norms. This can be explained by the optimism they have in their risk estimates, and thus not perceiving their behaviour as riskier than others'. This lack of inhibition resulting from a high-power state can lead to a range of behaviours. For example, a leader with high power are more willing to approach someone who are not performing their best and offer to train them. In the same situation, a leader low on power would resort to inhibition-related behaviour such as compensating the poor performance by increasing own effort or ostracizing or eliminate the individual from the work unit (Ferguson et al., 2010). This suggests that low-power individuals are more situationally motivated in their responses whereas high-power individuals have a range of responses.

Galinsky et al., (2008) suggests that people of power are not limited by the forces of the situation, meaning they will not be constricted in voicing their novel ideas in situations limiting creativity for others. They argue that power reduces the influence of the situation. So why are powerful individuals less influenced by the situation? According to Galinsky et al., (2008), it stems from two psychological reasons. First, they are not as likely to notice all information. Second, even if they notice the information they value it to a lesser extent and therefore are not affected by it in the same way. This might also be because they are more optimistic and risk-seeking, as previously mentioned by Anderson and Galinsky (2006).

Inequity in power can be disruptive to harmonious social relations, limiting the possibility that the power holder can maintain close relations to the less powerful. This is because power increases the likelihood that the individual will attempt to influence and manipulate others. In addition, having power may develop a sense of justification for using that power, resulting in a negative feedback loop such that the behaviour is reproduced (Kipnis, 1972).

2.4 The corruptive effects of power

The academic literature and popular media is abundant with examples of how power corrupts individuals, for example, using power to profit for themselves or violating social norms. It may seem that individuals who are bestowed with power become less sensitive to the psychological cost of misusing their power, even if they initially are honest individuals (Bendahan et al., 2015). For example, Nell and Strumpfer (1978) found that power is positively related to drinking in terms of frequency, quantity and early starting age. Additionally, they found that power correlated significantly with the disinhibition factor. The disinhibition factor is termed the “swinger factor” by Zuckerman (1971), as it consists of items that show the loss of inhibitions; heavy drinking, a variety in sexual partners, “wild parties” and gambling. A renowned study by Haney, Banks and Zimbardo (1973) considered how power impacted individuals who experienced or obtained power. The aim was to gain insight into interpersonal dynamics in a prison environment. They found out that those who played the guards experienced increased social power, status and group identification. Additionally, one third of the guards showed more aggressive and dehumanizing behaviours towards their prisoners, than what was expected in this type of experiment. This contributed to the notion that power can change the behaviour of those who obtain it, or find themselves in a position of power. The implications for leadership is obvious because the role as a leader inherently involves having power to decide over others. Mostly, this is a necessity for performing the job, but sometimes it can also be misused to serve personal gains at the expense of public wealth (Bendahan et al, 2015).

Galinsky, Magee, Inesi & Gruenfeld’s (2006) experiments suggests that power reduces our ability to comprehend how others see, think and feel about the world. When primed with power, individuals were less likely to adopt another person's perspective, thereby making them less capable of detecting and predicting the emotional states of others. The researchers believe that ignoring others’ perspectives is not a conscious decision, but power makes perspective taking less likely. When comparing high and low power individuals, high power individuals focused less on others’ psychological experiences, effectively reducing their empathy. Similarly, leaders who have a subjective experience of power have the possibility of increasing the tendency to verbally dominate social interactions. This can be explained by the effect subjective power have on increasing talking,

which in turn decreases subordinates' perception of how open the leader is to other's input (Tost et al., 2013).

Across five studies, power corrupted how individuals in power evaluated the kind acts of others (Inesi, Gruenfeld & Galinsky, 2012). I.e., favours done by either a spouse or colleagues were more cynically evaluated when the individual receiving the favour was powerful. Inesi et al (2012) argues that by being in position of power the kind acts of others become more ambiguous (are people being kind only to gain access to something I control?). Without ambiguity, kind acts can serve as a building block in strong relationships. However, with ambiguity and the cynical attributions to kind acts of others, the gestures are tainted in the mind of the receiver, in turn diminishing the potential for a strong relationship.

Power does not always lead to corruptive or inappropriate behaviour. Handgraaf, Van Dijk, Vermunt, Wilke & De Dreu, (2008) argues that it is not always the case that powerful individuals will exploit those who are deemed powerless. In their study, they found results suggesting that if individuals in power were confronted by those powerless, feelings of social responsibility were aroused. Thus, those in power might deem the use of power inappropriate. DeCelles, DeRue, Margolis, & Ceranic's (2012) results suggest that the moral identity has an impact on behaviour of self-interest when feeling powerful. This means that power will appreciate moral consciousness in individuals with strong moral identity. Similarly, moral consciousness will depreciate for those with low moral identity. DeCelles et al., (2012) theorize that the moral consciousness in turn will have an impact on how these individuals behave regarding their self-interest. This means that high power individuals scoring high on moral identity will increasingly behave in ways which benefits the common good over self-interest. On the other hand, high power individuals low on moral identity will behave in a more self-oriented manner.

2.5 Personality and power

Central to the discussion of personality is dominance, which can be thought of as a personality trait described as "the capacity to exercise coercive power" (Chapais, 2015, p. 163). Dominance evolved as a way of attaining status in society, which granted access to various types of advantages, one of them being power (Chapais, 2015). It is a stable personality construct that can predict whether

an individual perceives themselves as having power or not (Anderson et al, 2012). Dominance has been shown to be a persistent personality trait across situations, and involve behaviour such as speaking firmly, expressing opinions, taking the lead and asking others to do things (Moskowitz, 1994).

Anderson and Brion (2014) review literature on power and concludes that there are several personality traits that predict who acquires power and who does not. People high on narcissism, trait dominance and self-monitoring were found to be more likely to seek out power. This can be explained by behaviours associated with these traits, such as seeking out social status, obtaining control over resources and social relations (Anderson & Brion, 2014). According to Anderson and Kilduff (2009), individuals high on trait dominance may be defined by their motivation to obtain power and control in groups. One should be aware that these individuals will not only use aggressive and negative techniques (bullying and intimidation), they may also try to maintain their position by appearing helpful to the group's progress. The study conducted by Anderson and Kilduff (2009) indicates that dominant individuals gained influence over groups because they were perceived as competent by their peers. However, the reason they achieved levels of influence over others was not due to their confidence, but due to them acting in ways that caused them to be perceived as competent. In general, their findings suggest that the personality trait dominance can distort how abilities are perceived and make it difficult to detect who is competent and not. Furthermore, Lord, De Vader and Alliger (1986) found that trait dominance is significantly related to how we perceive leaders, even more than intelligence and masculinity/femininity.

Having a personal sense of power, i.e. merely perceiving that you have the ability to influence others, are linked to a range of personality constructs. Anderson, John and Keltner (2012) found that locus of control (the belief that you having control of your own fate), narcissism (preoccupation with success and need for admiration), self-esteem (appraising one's self-worth), extraversion (energetic approach to the social world), conscientiousness (task- and goal directed behaviour) and openness to experience (inclination to new experiences) are positively related to personal sense of power whereas neuroticism (vulnerability to stress) and Machiavellianism (manipulation of others for personal gain) are negatively related. In line with Keltner, Gruenfeld and Anderson (2003), behavioural activation was also found to relate to power and behavioural

inhibition were negatively related. The importance of identifying the relation between individual personality constructs and power is that this will influence the discussion of how individuals might react when primed with power. Anderson et al (2012) also find that a personal sense of power is consistent across social contexts and relationships, hence the perception of power within oneself can be distinguished as a stable feature of an individual.

A study by Dovidio, Brown, Heltman, Ellyson and Keating (1988) examined how men and women behaved across different situations. What they found was that males displayed more dominant behaviour compared to females (who smiled more) in social settings. Watson and Hoffman (1996) investigated gender and negotiation skills as part of their experiment on managers as negotiators. Previous literature showed a belief that women are generally nicer and therefore possibly less effective as negotiators compared to their male peers. Watson and Hoffman (1996) results found no support of the gender effect, meaning that both experienced male and female managers were neither worse nor better as negotiators. It is therefore interesting to note that even though managerial women felt less confident before the negotiation and less satisfied with their performance, they received similar results to male counterparts. High power individuals felt more powerful both prior and after the negotiations, as could be expected. This, might lead us to think that high power individuals would be more prone to dominate their competition in a negotiation. However, results showed that because high power parties expected their low power counterpart to cooperate, they initiated a form of problem solving interaction where needs from both sides are met, instead of adopting a win-lose mindset.

In a study by Colston and Lee (2004), when both male and female participants were asked to judge speakers who used verbal irony (without revealing the gender of the speakers), most participants thought the ironic speaker was male. Two studies using self-rating, found that male participants report a higher inclination to use irony compared with their female peers (Colston, & Lee, 2004; Ivanko, Pexman, & Olineck, 2004). Additionally, a study by Drucker, Fein, Bergerbest and Giora (2014) found that males had an overall higher enjoyment using sarcasm than females. However, Colston and Lee (2004) point out that men are not necessarily more sarcastic but rather use verbal irony more often. Baptista, Macedo and Boggio (2015) found that both male and female participants were equally competent when attempting to grasp the ironic meaning of different

sequences. However, a study by Ivanko et al., (2004) showed that female participants rated ironic statements more sarcastic compared with men, when the statement was directed as a compliment. Additionally, the results suggest that females found criticism or negative remarks less polite than men, which contributes to their argument that females might be more sensitive and therefore experience irony in a more sarcastic manner. Hence, there seems to be general differences in how women and men perceive and use communication in organisations (Tannen, 1995). Whether these differences are biologically or culturally dependent we will not delve in to in this paper as it is not relevant for the research question.

Similarly, a study by Lai (2014, p. 59) rated 60 participants on their agreeableness to various assertions on gender and leadership. Participants were divided in pairs of one male and one female, and asked to reach consensus on statements such as “men perform better than women in top leadership positions”. Women were found to be less assertive about their opinion and more lenient to their male counterpart’s view. However, when the female participants were introduced to semantic priming to evoke feelings of power the outcome changed significantly. Female participants primed with power showed greater persistence and stubbornness in the discussion. Keltner, Gruenfeld and Anderson (2003) argued that elevated power is associated with disinhibition and therefore empowers the individual to voice their opinions more confidently.

2.6 Sarcasm and irony

Rhetoric describe sarcasm and irony as modes of expression that breaks with the ordinary way of saying something by questioning or distancing oneself from what one is saying. It relies on the tension, contrast or gap between what is said and what is meant, the purpose being to add humoristic, aesthetic or argumentative effects (Kjeldsen, 2006). The Oxford English Dictionary defines irony as:” the expression of one’s meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect”. I.e. starting a presentation about saving money by saying that saying that money is not important, while your point is the opposite. Irony may exist in various forms, such as irony of fate and verbal irony. Irony of fate refers to ironic states of affair that can be explicitly labelled, whereas in verbal irony an attitude is expressed by a speaker by saying something that is not literally true and might not be explicit either (Kreuz &

Glucksberg, 1989). For example, irony of fate can be a traffic constable getting his licence suspended for driving too fast, whereas verbal irony is saying to your friends that you are happy with spending your Saturday at work doing a boring task rather than doing something fun with them. It hence relies on the understanding of the audience to uncover the true meaning.

Sarcasm is a form of verbal irony where the purpose is to hurt by uttering a negative, critical or truthful comment about something or someone in a sharp and often satirical way (Kreuz & Glucksberg, 1989). Compared to delivering criticism directly, sarcasm is likely to be perceived as more ambiguous due to different perspectives and interpretations between the sender and receiver of the message. For instance, the message can be perceived as offensive, verbally aggressive, anger provoking, mocking, insincere, impolite, but also humorous and somewhat unclear. The receiver of a sarcastic message may feel the impact to a greater extent than what was intended by the sender. Still, being verbally aggressive directly is perceived as more severe than sarcasm (Toplak & Katz, 2000).

Depending on what the sender wants to achieve, there are different ways in which irony can be used. Hence, there are various forms of irony, namely Socratic irony and sarcastic irony (Kjeldsen, 2006, p. 200-204). Socratic irony is a way of pretending ignorance to expose another person's ignorance. Socrates often used this kind of irony by carefully posing questions that would expose someone's ignorance in his discussions. The work of actor and director Sacha Baron Cohen heavily rely on this type of sarcasm. For example, Borat, the seemingly ignorant Kazakhstan reporter traveling to America to learn about the greatest country in the world, will during his encounters with Americans expose that the country may not be the greatest in the world. Sarcastic irony is the strongest and most influential type of irony, while also being perceived as the most aggressive and negative type because it must be directed at someone (Kjeldsen, 2006, p. 203; Gibbs, 1986). For example, if someone contributes to a discussion with an opinion that is clearly misplaced, a response in this manner would be "you really hit the nail on the head there. Spot on, mate". This type of irony is typically used as a "face-saving" tool because the sender can deliver criticism without being perceived as too direct (Jørgensen, 1996).

2.7 Research question and Hypotheses

As shown in the theoretical framework, people in power can be more prone to express their true attitudes and opinions (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002).

Additionally, it was argued that people in power might show more disinhibited behaviours, and violate social norms (Keltner, Gruenfeld & Anderson, 2003). The research question is therefore formulated as following:

Does power enhance the inclination to use sarcastic irony?

Hypothesis 1 investigates if power makes individuals more susceptible to engage in the use of sarcastic irony. As discussed above, sarcasm is a form of irony aimed to hurt the receiver, and it is thus of interest to explore how situational power might influence the inclination to use sarcastic irony. The use of ironic sarcasm, for example, might in certain contexts be deemed inappropriate and hurtful. The first hypothesis is therefore:

Power will enhance the tendency to use sarcastic irony

Hypothesis 2 is investigating whether personality has a moderating effect on how inclined people are to use sarcastic irony. Because dominance is associated with power seeking behaviour (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009), domination in social situations (Chapais, 2015) and influencing others (Moskowitz, 1994), it is hypothesised that trait dominance will have an effect on how inclined people are to use sarcastic irony when influenced by power. The justification for proposing trait dominance as a moderator rests on the findings of Anderson and Berdahl (2002), in which they discover that the subjective feeling of power mediates approach/inhibition related behaviour through trait dominance, such as expressing honest attitudes. The second hypothesis is therefore:

Trait dominance will moderate the effect of power, in that those high on trait dominance will be more likely than those low on trait dominance to use sarcastic irony when experiencing power.

Studies investigating gender differences in the perceived use of verbal irony (Colston & Lee, 2004), inclination to use irony (Ivanko, Pexman, & Olineck, 2004) and the enjoyment of using sarcasm (Drucker, Fein, Bergerbest & Giora, 2014) lead us to believe that there likely exist gender differences in the use of sarcastic language. In addition, due to males being perceived as more assertive

(Lai, 2014) it is hypothesised that gender will have an effect on how inclined people are to use sarcastic irony when influenced by power. The third hypothesis is therefore:

Gender will moderate the effect of power, in that males will be more likely than females to use sarcastic irony when experiencing power.

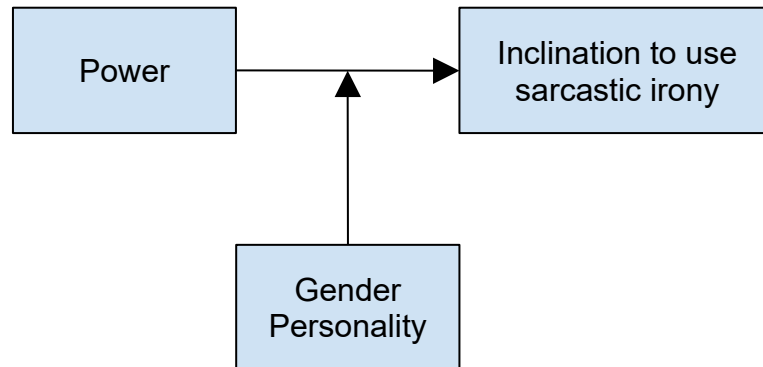


Figure 1. Hypothesis model

3.0 Method

3.1 Data collection

In this study, we have conducted an experiment to investigate the impact of situational power on individuals' use of sarcastic irony. To study the effects of power it is useful to perform experiments where participants are put in comparable groups that receive different priming (high or low power) in a given situation because this enables the study of the differences between these groups. In the current study, we have chosen to perform an experiment where two different response variants (forced choice and Likert scale) are used (see Appendix 1), to investigate the potential impact power priming has on the inclination to use sarcastic irony.

Power has been previously described as a structural variable (French & Raven, 1959) or property of a social relationship (Emerson, 1962), but it can also be conceived of as a psychological property of an individual (Galinsky, Gruenfeld & Magee, 2003). General construct activation, otherwise known as priming, means that when mental constructs stored in the memory are activated, associated concepts and behavioural tendencies are also activated (Galinsky et al., 2003).

Hence, “activating the concept of power should activate those behavioural tendencies associated with power” (Galinsky et al., 2003, p. 455). To induce participants with power the experiment will rely on semantic priming. This is done by asking the participants to visualise themselves in a specific situation by reading a vignette that reflects either a high or a low power condition. Moreover, the experiment investigated specific findings related to gender and trait dominance to test hypotheses 2 and 3.

3.2 Sample

The data collection yielded 471 responses, of which 96 were missing or incomplete, resulting in sample size $N = 375$. The first variant (forced choice) received 208 of these responses, whereas variant two (Likert scale) received 167. The distribution between male and female were 43% and 57% accordingly. Age was grouped in 6 categories; category 1 (Under 20 years), category 2 (20-29 years), category 3 (30-39 years), category 4 (40-49 years), category 5 (50-59 years), category 6 (60-69 years) and category 7 (over 70 years). The sample had the following distribution on age; category 1 ($n = 3$), category 2 ($n = 107$), category 3 ($n = 74$), category 4 ($n = 91$), category 5 ($n = 77$), category 6 ($n = 5$) and category 7 ($n = 0$).

Even though leadership experience was not posited as a moderator we gathered data on years of leadership experience to see if it could serve as a potential moderator. Leadership experience was grouped in 4 categories: category 1 (0 years), category 2 (1-5 years), Category 3 (5-10 years) and category 4 (more than 10 years). The sample from the experiment had the following distribution; category 1 ($n = 145$), category 2 ($n = 109$), category 3 ($n = 57$) and category 4 ($n = 62$).

The questionnaire was distributed through personal LinkedIn and Facebook accounts, as well as the intranet at DNB. The only entering requirement was that the participants could read and understand Norwegian. They were informed that the questionnaire was investigating how people interact in the workplace. The purpose of the study was never revealed to any of the participants.

3.3 Measures

The dependent variable in the experiment was sarcastic irony. The experiment relied on two different variants of the same experiment (forced choice and Likert

scale) to measure the effect of power on irony from two different perspectives, and to reduce source of error. When participants are only given a forced choice option they might feel drawn towards the less ironic answer in order to adhere to social norms (Crandall, Eshleman & O'brien, 2002). Thus, the Likert scale variant was included, which asks the participants to rate the likelihood that they will use a sarcastic irony response.

Variant one (forced choice) - After reading the vignette (appendix 1), participants are presented with three possible responses to the vignette. Response one is the neutral option, response two is the slightly sarcastic option, and response three is the sarcastic option. In the second part of the experiment participants are asked to fill in gender and age before they answer 14 questions aimed at measuring trait dominance (see appendix 1).

Variant two (Likert scale) - After reading the vignette, participants are presented with a seven-point Likert-scale instead of forced choice. This response has the same wording as alternative 3 from experiment one (see appendix 1). In the second part of the experiment they are presented with the same questions as participants in variant one; gender, age and 14 questions measuring trait dominance. Both variants were distributed using Qualtrics randomizer tool to ensure an equal distribution of the two variants.

Our independent variable is situational power, which was divided into two categories, high power priming (category 1), or low power priming (category 2). The potential moderators tested is gender and trait dominance. Before reading the vignette (see appendix 1), the participants were randomly assigned to the different power priming categories. Participants assigned to the high-power condition was coded as category 1 while those assigned to the low-power condition was coded as category 2.

3.4 Statistical procedure

To test our hypothesis, we conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) analysis using the statistical software SPSS. We used both one-way variance analysis and two-way variance analysis to test our hypothesis and check for moderating effects. Additionally, we have checked the factor loadings on the trait dominance tool using SPSS, and tested the overall fit of the trait dominance tool performing a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in STATA.

3.4.1 Dominance scale

The measure for dominance is taken from the work of John Ray (1981). The tool is designed for use with the general population and the construct measured is dominance. The original Directiveness scale (Ray, 1981) holds a coefficient alpha reliability of .89, showing correlations with actual dominant behaviour (.405) and submissiveness (-.388). The shorter 14-question version used in this paper show similar correlations with dominant and submissive behaviour (Ray, 1976, 1981, 1980) and are thus deemed appropriate for use in the experiment (appendix 2). Item 4, “If anyone is going to be Top Dog, would you rather it be you?”, has been excluded because “top dog” is not a common expression in Norway and thus might confuse some participants about its intended meaning. Additionally, the tool had to be translated into Norwegian. It is important to point out that our study use a preliminary translation of the trait dominance tool. The aim was to ensure proximity to the original tool, and to retain the original meaning. Within the boundaries of this study it was not possible to conduct a professional translation (translate - translate back) and statistical validation of the tool.

4.0 Results

4.1 Forced choice method

Hypothesis 1 - situational role

H1: High situational power will enhance the tendency to use sarcastic irony.

The analyses revealed significant differences ($p = 0.05$, $F = 2.606$) between how participants reacted when presented with the high- and low-power vignette, which means that those primed with high power were more inclined to use sarcastic irony compared to those primed with low power. The means between the low- and high-power groups are: Males (high power = 1.51 / low power = 1.20), Females (high power 1.33 / low power 1.11)

Hypothesis 2 - trait dominance

H2: Trait dominance will moderate the effect of power, in that those high on trait dominance will be more likely than those low on trait dominance to use sarcastic irony when experiencing power.

Results reveal no support for H2.

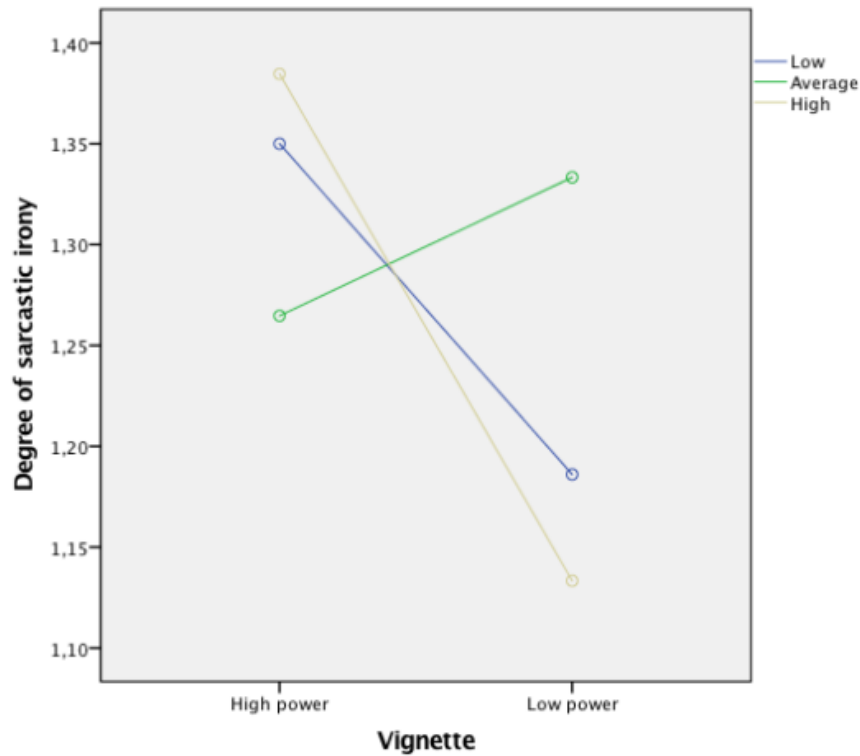


Figure 2. Trait dominance mean score

Hypothesis 3 - gender

H3: Gender will moderate the effect of power, in that males will be more likely than females to use sarcastic irony when experiencing power.

There is support for H3 ($p = 0.001$, $F = 9.792$). Additionally, the effect of situational power for each gender is significant ($p = 0.05$) level. However, the difference in mean value between high and low power priming is quite low, which is indicated by the slope of the graph in figure 2.

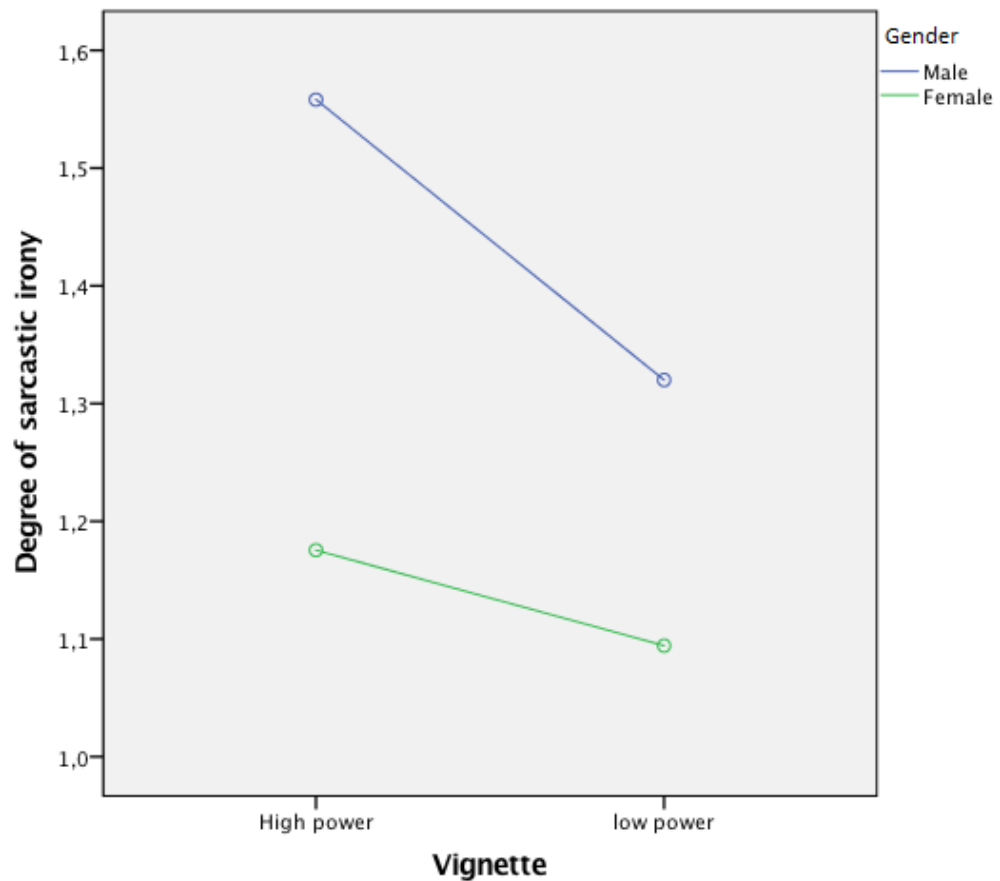


Figure 3. Gender mean score

4.2 Likert scale method

When participants were given the Likert scale option the results showed no significant differences, between the groups primed with low vs. high situational power.

5.0 Discussion

The results from the experiment (Variant 1) suggest that situational power increases the inclination to use sarcastic irony. This is in line with previous research on disinhibition from Keltner, Gruenfeldt and Anderson (2003) and Carver and White (1994). The main idea of the current study is that when people are in a state of high power they are less constrained by the social forces that restrain them from expressing themselves freely, as expressed by sarcastic irony. The vignette illustrated a hypothetical situation in which someone was severely late to a meeting, and the participant's reaction to that person when he finally arrived. This situation naturally induce dissatisfaction because being late puts the meeting holder in an awkward position, and the experiment hence attempts to

measure how honestly that dissatisfaction is expressed. Even though sarcastic irony is still a milder and more ambiguous expression of opinion than explicitly expressing discontent, it is still more honest than suppressing it. The sender of sarcastic irony can deliver criticism without being perceived as too direct (Jørgensen, 1996). Hence, the disinhibition theory may explain why being in power increases the inclination to use sarcastic irony.

The analysis showed no support for H2, which means there were no connection between trait dominance and inclination to use sarcastic irony. This might be attributed several reasons; the trait dominance measure lacking the ability to capture real dominant personalities, dominant personality does not necessarily lead to using more sarcasm, and people's restraint is stronger than their need to express sarcastic irony.

The trait dominance scale used in this study started out as a measure of authoritarianism intended to predict if some people may behave in the same manner as the Nazis during world war 2, based on their attitudes to authority (Ray, 1976). After several revisions and repeated confirmations of its reliability and validity the measure turned into a measure of dominant behaviour directed toward others that is distinct from authoritarianism (Ray, 1980; Ray, 1981; Ray & Lovejoy, 1983). Nevertheless, it is possible that the passing of time and different cultural values might make the instrument unsuitable in this study.

The initial idea of hypothesis 2 was that dominant people are more likely to seek out power, and power makes people more inclined to use sarcasm. Hence, dominant people may be more inclined to use sarcasm. Even though dominance is a stable personality construct arguably inducing free expression of opinion (Anderson et al, 2012; Moskowitz, 1994) it does not seem to influence enough whether one is inclined to be sarcastic or not. Figure 2 show a difference between people with the highest and lowest score on the trait dominance scale in terms of their inclination to be sarcastic, but these findings were not within the boundaries of required significance. Another explanation for the lack of significant results related to hypothesis 2 might be attributed to the social norms that restrain people from expressing their true opinion. Even if participants might be frustrated by the situation described in the vignette, situational power may not be enough for people to transgress norms about displaying (passive) aggressiveness in the workplace.

Hypothesis 3 affirmed previous research that males are more prone to using verbal sarcasm than females (Drucker, Fein, Bergerbest & Giora, 2014; Colston, & Lee, 2004; Ivanko, Pexman, & Olineck, 2004; Colston & Lee, 2004). This could be attributed to males being more pronounced when it comes to verbal aggression (Hyde, 2005; Archer, 2004). Tannen (1995) argues that boys and girls learn from young age different ways of communicating, different conversational rituals and styles, which lead to different habitual ways of saying what they mean later in life. This can be explained by Social Selection Theory - evolutionary forces required men to resort to overt aggression (Archer, 2004). Through the socialisation process boys learn that aggressive responding is appropriate to certain situations and this may manifest itself in various ways in the workplace. Furthermore, men tend to be more directed towards the status dimension of conversation, whereas women tend to focus on the rapport dimension of conversation (Tannen, 1995). In this regard, sarcastic irony is not purposeful for creating rapport and may explain why it is being used less by women.

6.0 Limitations and future research

Considering the inherent limitations of the trait dominance measure as discussed in section 5, it was natural to perform several statistical validations to test this claim. Exploratory factor analysis revealed inconsistent factor loadings of the 14 trait dominance variables. Where they should ideally all load on one factor because the measure is intended to measure only one construct, they are spread across five factors. In addition, confirmatory factor analysis show that only 3 variables display factor loadings above 0.4 (appendix 3). Removing the inadequate variables does not produce different results in terms of the moderating effect of personality. In addition, reliability analysis returns a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.473, which is generally below what is acceptable for a psychological measure (Cortina, 1993). Confirmatory factor analysis revealed a root mean squared error of approximation at 0.073, which is considered acceptable model fit, but far from good (0.05) or excellent (0.01) (MacCallum, Browne & Sugawara, 1996). These evidences point to flaws in the trait dominance measure which might have prevented a moderating effect on the dependent variable in the overall model to be uncovered.

With the trait dominance tool, we relied upon a preliminary translation. This might have diminished the strength of the tool (as cultural differences might

create interference), in turn making it difficult to find significant results. For future research, it will be beneficial to perform a translate-translate back procedure to remove inconsistencies in translation and increase the accuracy of the tool for use in Norwegian. Given the lack of statistical support the measure, future research will have to go through a rigorous process of validating the tool before using it.

A possible explanation for the lack of support for hypothesis 2 (on the Likert scale measure) might be due to the harshness of the inherent purpose in a sarcastic response. As previously mentioned, Kreuz and Glucksberg (1989) argued that the purpose of sarcasm is to hurt by uttering a negative, critical or truthful comment in a sharp and satirical way. It might be that such a response is too harsh for most people and that an ironic response (not aimed at hurting the receiver), would lead participants to be more inclined in the use of irony. For future research, it would be interesting to let all three responses be rated. Additionally, it could be that a less harsh wording, closer related to the ironic statement (Appendix 2, A2) would be more effective in producing a normally distributed response.

Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld (2006) suggests that to facilitate effective communication it is required that the sender take into account what the audience knows together with the perspective. I. e. If you were to compliment someone on their shoes, the phrase “nice kicks” can easily be understood both as a compliment and an insult, depending on who you are talking to. An inherent limitation could therefore be our responses, as they might be understood incorrectly. Our response aimed at being frank (Appendix 1, A1) might have the potential to come across as ironic. As previously discussed Colston and Lee (2004), found that without revealing the gender, most participants thought the speaker was male. Also, Colston and Lee (2004) and Ivanko, Pexman and Olineck (2004) found that males report using more irony than their female peers. Additionally, it is worth remembering that Drucker, Fein, Bergerbest and Giora (2014) reported that males enjoy using irony and sarcasm to a higher extent than females. Based on this research, it might be of interest to consider if gender enhances the inclination to use irony and sarcasm *directly*.

Because sarcasm may be used as a masked and ambiguous form of criticism, future research could take this further by investigating whether power influences the inclination to be explicitly critical.

The current experiment was conducted in Norway, with Norwegian speaking participants. Hofstede's (1984) vast research on cultural difference, and especially his research on cultural differences in large versus small power distance cultures, would be of interest in relation to irony and sarcasm. As previously discussed, power could lead to less inhibited behaviours. For future research, it could therefore be interesting to investigate if cultural power distance has an impact on inclinations to use irony and sarcasm.

7.0 Implications

The findings from this study, combined with previous research on gender differences in communication and behaviour, give a picture of men as slightly more verbally aggressive and forthright. This is further enhanced when power is in the picture. This has two important implications. Firstly, the interpretation of sarcasm is subjective and ambiguous, requiring the receiver to use subjective judgement to decipher its intended meaning. This means that communication that is distinguished by sarcasm is difficult to interpret, which in turn might hinder effective communication. On the other hand, as we have established that using sarcasm is a form of expressing criticism without being too direct, hence it can be considered as a way of being honest. Expressing discontent when an action has not been perceived as acceptable could be said to be necessary for a constructive relation. Therefore, giving someone critique through sarcasm might be a way of being honest, without being too direct.

There is an ongoing debate in the academic literature and popular press about the difference in gender regarding leadership effectiveness and whether one has an advantage over the other (Gipson, Pfaff, Mendelsohn, Catenacci & Burke, 2017; Post, 2015; Paustian-Underdahl, Walker & Woehr, 2014; Hyde, 2005). The findings from this study contribute to this discussion by showing subtle differences in communication style in terms of who is more likely to resort to sarcastic language.

Another important implication of this study is illustrating the importance of power and gender in how people interact in the workplace. Leaders and HR practitioners should be aware of the effect power has on people, and be attentive to which conditions might lead to potential power abuse. This study has illustrated that there is a relation between having a sense of power, gender and communication. Initially we asked who would resort to sarcastic irony. The

empirical findings suggest that people in power, and men in particular, are inclined to use sarcastic irony in the workplace. By further investigating relevant aspect of personality, gender and culture, researchers can strengthen the knowledge on the effects of power so that we better can understand how various factors affect people in the workplace. The pursuit of this kind of knowledge contributes to creating a just and equitable workplace.

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9.0 Appendices

Appendix 1 - Norwegian version of...

Takk for at du deltar i denne studien.

Undersøkelsen handler om hvordan man samhandler på arbeidsplassen og alle svar er anonyme.

Undersøkelsen består av to deler:

- 1) En beskrivelse av en hypotetisk situasjon
- 2) Deretter noen korte spørsmål

Stimuli (High power):

Prøv å sette deg inn i følgende situasjon:

De siste 10 årene har du vært ansatt som prosjektleder i en stor multinasjonal bedrift, og har stadig steget i gradene. Du har levert svært gode resultater og har fått ansvar for stadig større og viktigere prosjekt innen selskapet. Du trives i lederrollen og liker det store ansvaret som følger med din høye posisjon.

Stimuli (Low power):

Prøv å sette deg inn i følgende situasjon:

Du er nyansatt trainee i prosjektledelse i en stor multinasjonal bedrift. Du har lite erfaring og er opptatt av å gjøre en god jobb, slik at du får fortsette i selskapet etter at trainee-perioden er over. Som nyansatt kjenner du presset av de høye forventningene til deg.

Case:

Nå har du fått ansvaret for å lede et viktig møte om firmaets fremtid.

En konsulent fra et eksternt konsulentfirma er kalt inn og skal i dagens møte presentere en sluttrapport fra en analyse de har gjort. Konsulentutredningen skal danne grunnlag for påfølgende diskusjon og vedtak samme dag. Vedtaket kommer til å få store konsekvenser for konsernets videre drift. Det er ventet at en pressemelding går ut etter dagens møte.

På møtedagen har samtlige deltakere innfunnet seg i god tid, unntatt konsulenten som skal presentere rapporten. Tiden går og flere kikker utålmodig på klokken etter at møtet skulle ha startet. Flere av deltakerne har reist langt for å kunne innfinne seg og tid er en meget knapp ressurs for alle tilstedeværende. Du har forsøkt å ringe konsulenten flere ganger uten å få svar.

Til slutt går du ut på gangen for å gjøre et siste forsøk. I det du skal til å ringe ankommer konsulenten -nå en hel halvtime forsinket –og sier “Beklager at jeg kommer litt for sent.”

Hva ville du svart konsulenten som kommer for sent? Velg det alternativet under

som umiddelbart virker mest naturlig for deg.

Eksperiment 1 respons:

A1:” Ikke noe problem, sånt skjer, Vi går inn, så får du satt i gang forttest mulig.” (1)

A2:” Velkommen! Lang og deilig frokost?” (2)

A3:” Ikke noe problem, det er bare framtiden til selskapet som står på spill.” (3)

Eksperiment 2 respons:

På en skala fra 1-7 (Hvor en er svært sannsynlig, og syv er svært usannsynlig) hvor sannsynlig er det at du vil svare noe liknende:

” Ikke noe problem, det er bare framtiden til selskapet som står på spill”.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(Svært sannsynlig)						(Svært usannsynlig)

Q2 Ditt kjønn:

Mann (1)

Kvinne (2)

Q3. Din Alder:

Under 20 år (1)

20 - 29 år (2)

30 - 39 år (3)

40 - 49 år (4)

50 - 59 år (5)

60 - 69 år (6)

70 år eller over (7)

Q4. Hvor mange års lederansvar har du (formell lederstilling, med økonomi- og personalansvar)?

0 år (1)

1-5 år (2)

5-10 år (3)

Mer enn 10 år (4)

Q5. Dominans:

Ja (3) Nei (1) Vet ikke (2). Reversert: Ja (1) Nei (3) Vet ikke 2.

3= Dominant

Under kommer noen spørsmål til deg. Svar så raskt og ærlig som mulig.

1. Er du typen som alltid liker å få ting på din måte?
2. Pleier du å “sjefe” med andre folk?
3. Misliker du å skille deg ut?
4. Hvis noen skulle være leder, ser du helst at det er deg? (reversert)
5. Pleier du å dominere samtalen?
6. Lar du din samboer/kjæreste/bestevenn få viljen sin for det meste? (reversert)
7. Er du generelt sett en følger heller enn en leder? (reversert)
8. Ville du foretrukket å være en arbeider heller enn en leder? (reversert)

9. Pleier du å være den som tar avgjørelser hjemme?
10. Liker du å ha det siste ordet i en diskusjon?
11. Misliker du å holde taler foran mange folk? (for eksempel si et par ord i et bryllup) (reversert)
12. I en diskusjon, argumenterer du for ditt eget syn selv om du er i mindretall?
13. Heller enn å krangle, lar du noen ganger andre vinne diskusjonen? (reversert)
14. Prøver du å tilegne deg autoritet der du kan?

Appendix 2 - translated version of the Dominance Scale

Er du typen som alltid liker å få ting på din måte?	Are you the sort of person who always likes to get their own way?
Pleier du å "sjefe" med andre folk?	Do you tend to boss people around?
Misliker du å skille deg ut?	Do you dislike standing out from the crowd? (reversed)
Hvis noen skulle være leder, ser du helst at det er deg?	If anyone is going to be Top Dog, would you rather it be you?
Pleier du å dominere samtaler?	Do you tend to dominate the conversation?
Lar du din samboer/kjæreste/bestevenn få viljen sin for det meste?	Do you let your wife (or husband) get their own way most of the time? (reversed)
Er du generelt sett en følger heller enn en leder?	Are you generally a follower rather than a leader? (reversed)
Ville du foretrukket å være en arbeider heller enn en leder?	Would you prefer to be a worker rather than a manager? (reversed)
Pleier du å være den som tar avgjørelser hjemme?	Do you tend to be the one who makes the decisions at home?
Liker du å ha det siste ordet i en diskusjon?	Do you like to have the last word in an argument or discussion?
Misliker du å holde taler foran mange folk? (for eksempel, si et par ord i et bryllup)	Do you hate giving speeches or talks in public (For example: Being asked to say a few words at a wedding)? (reversed)
I en diskusjon, argumenterer du for ditt eget syn selv om du er i mindretall?	In an argument Of discussion, will you argue for your own point of view even though you are in the minority?
Heller enn å krangle, lar du noen	Rather than argue, do you sometimes

ganger andre vinne diskusjonen?	let other people push you around a bit? (reversed)
Prøver du å tilegne deg autoritet der du kan?	Do you try to get yourself into positions of authority where you can?

Appendix 3 - Statistical validation of trait dominance measure

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Component Matrix

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
Item 1		,610			
Item 2	,440	,419			
Item 3 (reversed)		-,449			
Item 4	,653				
Item 5	,583				
Item 6 (reversed)		-,436	,460	-,410	
Item 7 (reversed)	,440	-,435			
Item 8 (reversed)	,507	-,408			
Item 9					-,504
Item 10			,419		,481
Item 11(reversed)				,480	
Item 12				,486	,461
Item 13 (reversed)			-,559	-,456	
Item 14	,658				

Confirmatory factor analysis

