Sarcasm is a common element of communication that serves a variety of pragmatic and interpersonal goals. Despite this popularity, however, use varies between individuals and situations. The current study built upon past research by Dress et al. (2008) regarding variability in the use of sarcasm (i.e., sarcasm production) across geographic region and gender by recruiting an online sample to examine differences in age, as well.

Past research on gender differences in sarcasm production has produced mixed results, depending on the form of measurement used. Sarcasm report measures tend to show slightly increased rates of sarcasm use in males, though these differences may be less pronounced or non-existent across multiple-choice or free response measures. As such, the current study used three measures of sarcasm production (i.e., self-report, multiple-choice, and free response), consistent with the procedures used in Dress et al. (2008).

Age has received little attention in the sarcasm production literature, though it has been shown that older adults comprehend sarcasm more poorly. As Amazon Mechanical Turk (mTurk) allows access to a broader sample, age was also examined. This study built upon the initial findings reported by Johnson and Kreuz (2018) by recruiting participants from outside the original geographic area (i.e., Pennsylvania) and recruiting a larger sample of older adults.

### Predictions

- **Males** will use and report using sarcasm more across measures.
- **Younger participants** will use and report using sarcasm more across measures.
- **Females and older adults** will define sarcasm as more negative and less humorous.

### Method

A total of 184 (96 Female) participants were recruited from mTurk for this study.

- **Participants’ age** ranged from 20-73 (M = 39.57, SD = 12.73). This was collapsed into three ordinal categories of Younger (20-31), Middle (32-43), and Older (44+).

Participants were given three measures of sarcasm use (see Materials) and were asked to define sarcasm and irony. Free responses were coded by two raters with 63% agreement. Descriptive data were coded for six characteristics, again with high agreement (95%). Disagreements were resolved through discussion.

### Results

Several patterns were observed across measures (see Table 2). Due to skewness, non-parametric tests (i.e., Kruskal Wallis; KW) were used for both Completions and Selections, while ANOVA was used for Self-Report.

- **Males** provided significantly more sarcastic Selections and Completions, and self-reported using sarcasm marginally more.
- **The Younger group** made significantly more sarcastic selections and Older females self-reported using sarcasm significantly less than all other groups.

The interaction could only be interpreted simply for Selections, as females reported significantly lower use, as KW does not permit n-way ANOVA designs.

### Conclusions

Consistent with past research, sarcasm use appears to vary with gender, with males using sarcasm more frequently; though, this varies by measure. This difference is numerically smaller among younger adults. Age itself is also related to differences in sarcasm use, with a tendency for older individuals to use it less. These patterns are consistent with definitions of sarcasm as negative, as well. Together, these findings suggest that sarcasm use varies with gender and age, though the measure used also affects this pattern.

### References