

## Humor styles and emotional competence among young adults

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### ABSTRACT

Humor's relationship to emotions has been addressed by a numerous study within the field of psychology. It is an essential component of social interaction as well as the very essence of an individual's personality. The purpose of this study is to uncover the association between humor styles and emotional competence and measure the strength of that relationship. Also, to understand the gender differences between them. This research is an attempt toward better understanding of how humor styles impact the crucial social skills to acknowledge, understand, and respond productively to emotions in individuals. The four humor styles as given by Martin, Affiliative, Self-enhancing, Aggressive and Self-deprecating were correlated with Emotional competence using the Humor styles questionnaire (HSQ) and the Emotional competence (EC) scale. A sample of 100 Indian young adults was taken for the study. The research concluded a positive correlation of Self-enhancing humor with Emotional competence in male young adults whereas indicated a significant positive correlation of Self-enhancing humor and negative relationship between Aggressive humor style and emotional competence in female young adults. The findings also revealed significant distinction in the use of Affiliative and Aggressive humor style between male and female young adults.

**Keywords:** *Humor styles, Emotional competence, Self-enhancing humor, Affiliative humor, Aggressive humor, Self-deprecating humor*

**H**umor has been a construct of fascination researched by varying fields of study. The concept is not just limited to mankind, even captive primates have been found to show humor appreciation (McGhee, 1979). Since the earliest days, researchers in the field of psychology are preoccupied with understanding the concept of Humor. Its multidimensional phenomenon makes it distinctive (Martin, 2003) and harder to define. Freud (1928) was the one who regarded humor as one of the healthiest forms of defense mechanisms as well as a source of managing anxiety along with expressing socially unacceptable impulses such as aggressive and sexual impulse. Withal it is also associated with efficient social relationships (Campbell, Martin and Ward, 2008) and enhances interpersonal relationships (Cann, Zapata and Davis, 2011). Forby connection to overall constructive facet in an individual's life like marital satisfaction, endurance of ailment such as cancer, adjusting to physical disability and prevention of suicide. (Buckman, 1994; Richman, 1995; de Koning & Weiss, 2002; Rust & Goldstein, 1989)

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While Humor is chiefly allied to efficacious sentiment and adjustable role, it also has a shadowy side. It is capable of inducing negative response as well. Humor may exude displeasure and hostility and may be potentially injurious. Great philosophers like Plato and Aristotle have linked humor with disparagement, aggression and superiority sentiments. (Ferguson, Ford, 2008) The dark side of humor can be exemplified by inspecting various sort of negative configuration of the comical aspect, and by inspecting the prospective influential consequence of this type of amusement in both the creator and the recipient. The use of this negative style of humor constantly can have negative impact on psychological wellbeing (Martin, 2003). Humor styles model as given by Martin Et. al., states that the concept of Humor can be classified into four dimensions which are, fairly constructive uses of humor to improve the self (Self-enhancing) and to enhance ones relations with others (Affiliative), utilization of humor to enhance the self at the expense of others (Aggressive), and use of humor to boost relations at the expense of self (Self-defeating).

Gender related differences are also seen to the extent that hysteric allied phenomenon is concerned. A great gender difference in the recognition, generation and utilization of humor is also evident by researches. (Lampert and Ervin-Tripp, 1998) For instance, women are seen to be inclined towards more non-sense ludicrous amusement whereas males tend to prefer more aggressive and sexual jokes. As far as gender contrasts, Men have been accounted for to create and make increasingly comical things (teasing, kidding, joking) (Lampert and Ervin-Tripp, 1998; Lundy, Tan, and Cunningham, 1998; Provine, 2000) and specializing in hostile pun (Crawford and Gressley, 1991), whereas women delivering more anecdotes, spontaneous stories and context related banter (Hay, 2000; Kotthoff, 2006).

Humor has the capacity to affect emotional regulation. It works both ways by having an intrinsic regulation function and extrinsic regulation function. In other words, it can be used to elate the feeling of self as well as others. Vernon and colleagues (2008) investigated that people possessing high emotional intellect would in general utilize Affiliative and Self-upgrading humor while people who lacked emotional intelligence would utilize aggressive and self-deprecating styles of humor. Greven, Chamorro-Premuzic, Arteche, and Furnham (2008) confirmed relations between emotional intelligence and the adaptive humor domains and negative relations with the maladaptive comical attributes. Yip and Martin (2006) inspected the connections between humor styles and emotional intellect and uncovered confirming relations between emotional management and self-enhancing humor. A research conducted by Kumar (2015) indicated Emotional competence as a predictor of cognitive strength. Characteristics such as self-assurance, self-acknowledgement, self-identity, self-realization, acceptance of others and bending to diverse circumstances were found essential components for emotive competence. Secure attachment from both parents was found to interrelate with emotive capability (Liable, 2007).

The present study aims to uncover any significant relationship of emotional competence with the four majorly acknowledged styles of humor. Both attributes have been positively linked to psychological as well as physical wellbeing and have a role in predicting the characteristics of personality (Martin, Kuiper, Olinger, & Dance, 1993; Dixon, 1980). It has already been established that humor can take a benevolent adverse shape conversely from being positively impacting our lives, so the study intends to relate both aspects to an overall measure for the emotional competence. Utilization of humor differs with respect to styles adhered by diverse genders, females were found to use more of self-enhancing type of humor whereas men tend to follow Aggressive type (Martin, 2003; Dyck. Et al, 2013). Emotive capabilities also show variation with respect to influence on gender. Females have

more developed intellect with respect to emotions as compared to males (Cabello et, al, 2016). The current research also targets to identify if any gender related difference is present between the two elements when considered together.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The objective of the present study was to uncover the relationship between Humor styles and emotional competence, to find gender related distinction in use of Humor styles and Emotional competence among male and female young adults. The hypotheses of the study comprised of stating significant relationship between the dimensions in styles of humor and emotional competence among male and female young adults. Significant gender difference in the use of humor styles' dimensions and emotional competence was also stated. The tools used included Humor Styles questionnaire (HSQ) by Martin and Doris and Emotional competence scale (EC) by Sharma and Bhardwaj and were administered on a population sample of 100 young adults. The locale of the study was Delhi/NCR.

#### ***Sample***

The sample comprised of a hundred people lying within the age group of 18 to 25 years with equal ratio of males to females. The sample was selected at random and majority of the population comprised of university students.

#### ***Instruments***

##### **Humor styles questionnaire (HSQ)**

The Humor style Questionnaire as developed by Rod A. Martin and Patricia Doris evaluates the four dimensions relating to different use of humor in daily routine. Two domains of these measurements are viewed as beneficial for psychosocial prosperity while two are estimated to be less considerate and possibly even injurious to wellbeing. The HSQ is a self-report measure that is composed of four dimensions which are, fairly constructive uses of humor to improve the self (Self-enhancing) and to enhance ones relations with others (Affiliative), utilization of humor to enhance the self at the expense of others (Aggressive), and use of humor to boost relations at the expense of self (Self-defeating). It has been interpreted into over 25 diverse languages. The HSQ is a 32-item assessment of individual differences in for distinct styles of humor, as detailed in Martin's model of Humor styles. The HSQ is psychometrically solid with suitable degrees of reliability and legitimacy. Study over a few nations archives the normal the four figured structure of the HSQ, relating to the four comical styles of the model (Affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive and self deprecating humor). This scale has been utilized in social, clinical, personality, developmental and organizational domain of psychology.

##### **Emotional competence scale**

The emotional competence scale is developed and standardized by Dr. H.C Sharma and R.L Bhardwaj. The scale is composed of 30 items and is available in both Hindi and English language with 5 given alternatives for each item. Emotional competence is an effective way to contract with various separable but linked courses and a combination of five competencies and for the development of EC-Scale these five competences were nominated: Adequate Depth of Feeling (ADF); Adequate Expression and Control of Emotions (AECE) ; Ability to Function with Emotions (AFE) ; Ability to Cope with Problems Emotions (ACPE) ; Enhancement of Positive Emotions (EPE). The reliability of the scale was calculated via employing two methods viz., test-retest (.74) and split-half method (.76). The validity of the scale was determined at 0.69. The scale is based on a 5-point Likert type and scoring of

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the choices follow an arrangement of 1,2,3,4, and 5 from upper to lower, where score 1 stands for strongly disagree, score 2 stands for disagree, score 3 stands for a neutral response, score 4 stands for agree and score 5 stands for strongly agree. The sum of horizontal raw scores is calculated for each dimension and is corresponded to a z-score. The sum of all the z-scores combined gives the overall emotional competence.

### *Procedure*

The two self-report measures were administered on the sample population. The administration of the two scales took about 15-20 minutes. The scores obtained were correlated among respective forms of humor in accordance with emotional competence using bivariate correlation in SPSS. Significant difference was also analyzed between groups divided on the basis of gender contrasts using independent t-test in SPSS.

## **RESULT & DISCUSSION**

The intention behind this study was to divulge the association between various humor styles to emotional competence and understanding that relationship in the light of gender contrasts. It can be safely said that participants indulged more in adaptive form of humor as compared to the maladaptive form.

Table 1 provides an overview of the correlation of humor styles and emotional competence among males. The results clearly show a significant bond between self-enhancing style of humor and emotional competence. Also, self-enhancing and affiliative humor were seen to share a relationship. Furthermore, aggressive style of humor also shared a link with self-enhancing humor. Aggressive humor style had a positive relationship with self-deprecating. And lastly a bond between self-enhancing and self-deprecating was also uncovered.

Among female participants as shown in Table 2 the correlation analysis yielded positive relations between self-enhancing humor style and emotional competence. And aggressive humor style was seen to have a negative relationship with emotional competence. The results also indicated significant difference in the practice of affiliative as well as aggressive humor styles between the genders (Table 3, Table 5). However, no significant difference between the genders were noted in respect to emotional competence (Table 7). The distinction among genders to indulge in self-enhancing and self-deprecating was found to be insignificant (Table 4, Table 6).

***Table 1 Correlation value between Humor Styles and Emotional competence among male young adults***

<b>Correlations (males)</b>		<b>EC</b>	<b>Affiliative</b>	<b>Self Enhancing</b>	<b>Aggressive</b>	<b>Self Deprecating</b>
EC	Pearson Correlation	1	.088	.289*	-.202	-.127
	Sig.		.545	.042	.158	.380
	N	50	50	50	50	50
Affiliative	Pearson Correlation	.088	1	.324*	.020	.081
	Sig.	.545		.022	.892	.575
	N	50	50	50	50	50
Self Enhancing	Pearson Correlation	.289*	.324*	1	.288*	.368**
	Sig.	.042	.022		.042	.009
	N	50	50	50	50	50

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Correlations (males)		EC	Affiliative	Self Enhancing	Aggressive	Self Deprecating
Aggressive	Pearson Correlation	-.202	.020	.288*	1	.497**
	Sig.	.158	.892	.042		.000
	N	50	50	50	50	50
Self Deprecating	Pearson Correlation	-.127	.081	.368**	.497**	1
	Sig.	.380	.575	.009	.000	
	N	50	50	50	50	50

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Significant relationship between Self-enhancing Humor and emotional competence in male young adults.

**Table 2 Correlation Value between Humor Styles and Emotional competence among female young adults**

Correlations (females)		EC	Affiliative	Self Enhancing	Aggressive	Self Deprecating
EC	Pearson Correlation	1	-.035	.421**	-.311*	-.082
	Sig.		.812	.002	.028	.572
	N	50	50	50	50	50
Affiliative	Pearson Correlation	-.035	1	.226	-.137	.013
	Sig.	.812		.115	.342	.929
	N	50	50	50	50	50
Self Enhancing	Pearson Correlation	.421**	.226	1	-.142	-.009
	Sig.	.002	.115		.324	.952
	N	50	50	50	50	50
Aggressive	Pearson Correlation	-.311*	-.137	-.142	1	.205
	Sig.	.028	.342	.324		.154
	N	50	50	50	50	50
Self Deprecating	Pearson Correlation	-.082	.013	-.009	.205	1
	Sig.	.572	.929	.952	.154	
	N	50	50	50	50	50

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Significant relationship between Self-enhancing humor and Emotional competence and a significant negative relationship between Aggressive humor and Emotional competence in Female young adults.

**Table 3 Mean and t value for Affiliative Humor among male and female young adults**

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	P
Affiliative	M	50	38.86	7.780	2.468	Sig*
	F	50	42.56	7.200		

Significant difference at 0.05 level

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**Table 4 Mean and t value for Self Enhancing Humor among male and female young adults**

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	P
Self Enhancing	M	50	36.18	8.022	1.332	Insig
	F	50	38.22	7.277		

*Insignificant difference at both levels*

**Table 5 Mean and t value for Aggressive Humor among male and female young adults**

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	P
Aggressive	M	50	29.56	6.643	2.800	Sig***
	F	50	25.50	7.812		

*Significant difference at both levels*

**Table 6 Mean and t value for Self Deprecating Humor among male and female young adults**

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	P
Self Deprecating	M	50	31.48	7.990	.256	Insig
	F	50	31.08	7.637		

*Insignificant difference at both levels*

**Table 7 Mean and t value for Emotional Competence among Male and Female young adults**

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	P
EC	M	50	259.50	32.269	.528	Insig
	F	50	262.74	28.993		

*Insignificant difference at both levels*

### CONCLUSION

The study concluded definite results indicating positive relations between Self enhancing humor and emotional competence among males whereas positive relations between self enhancing and negative association with aggressive humor and Emotional competence in female young adults. Furthermore, distinction in use of Affiliative humor and Aggressive humor was found between males and females lying in the youthful age criteria. Certain limitations of the study were also taken into consideration. A more through assessment and wider population sample is suggested for further research.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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