

Relationship between Humour Styles, Optimism and Self Esteem

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ABSTRACT

Humour is the essence of life. It is a special part of one's life that often rules one's memories and shapes and defines the individual. This study aimed at finding the relationship between humour style, optimism and self esteem among college students (18 - 25 years) who have finished their schooling and are entering adulthood while learning to be independent. The study investigates to which extent the four humour styles (Affiliative, Self enhancing, Aggressive & Self defeating) are associated with optimism and self esteem and also to find out the significant difference in the variables, among male and female students. Questionnaires were distributed online to males and females (n= 108). A cross sectional research design which comprised of college students (males= 46, females= 62) was adopted. The tools used were HSQ- humour styles questionnaire (Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003); LOT-R - life orientation test- revised (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994) and self esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Pearson product moment correlation was used to find out the significant relationship between the variables. Independent 't'- tests was used to compare male and female samples pertaining to the variables. The results and findings have been discussed in the article.

Keywords: *Humour styles, Optimism, Self esteem, college students*

It is widely believed that humor is an important resource for well-being. (Leist & Müller, 2012). Generally, humor is considered to influence the way an individual perceives various situations in life. Humor research is an emerging field and has only recently garnered attention. Psychologists have tried to classify humor and formulate theories and develop tools in order to understand humor better. One of the most influential tool, the Humor styles questionnaire (HSQ), that attempts to classify humor was developed by Rod martin, 2003. The existence of four types of humor is widely accepted and the HSQ assesses them. The four types are- affiliative , self enhancing, aggressive and self-defeating, Affiliative and self

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enhancing being benign and benevolent while aggressive and self defeating being injurious or detrimental (Martin et al., 2003).

Individuals who utilise affiliative style of humor are more likely to use jokes and humor to put others around them in a good mood. They use their clever impromptu humor to maintain smooth relationships. To put others at ease, they are also likely to engage in self-deprecating humor, saying funny things about themselves and not taking themselves overly seriously, while maintaining a sense of self-acceptance (Vaillant, 1977). This style of humor is expected to be related to extraversion, cheerfulness, self-esteem, intimacy, relationship satisfaction, and predominantly positive moods and emotions (Martin et al., 2003). Self-enhancing humour is a dimension involving a generally humorous outlook on life, a tendency to be frequently amused by the incongruities of life, and to maintain a humorous perspective even in the face of stress or adversity (Kuiper, Martin, & Olinger, 1993). Freudian definition of humor as a healthy defense mechanism that allows one to avoid negative emotions while maintaining a realistic perspective on a potentially aversive situation (Freud, 1928), is comparable to that of self enhancing humour. Aggressive style of humor relates to the use of sarcasm, teasing, ridicule, derision, “put-down,” or disparagement humor (Zillman, 1983). It also includes manipulating others by means of an implied threat of ridicule (Janes & Olson, 2000). This style of humor is known to inflict damage upon relationships. Self-defeating humor is a dimension that involves amusing others at their own expense. Although individuals who are high on this humor dimension may be seen as quite witty or amusing, there is an element of emotional neediness, avoidance, and low self-esteem underlying their use of humor (Fabrizi & Pollio, 1987).

Sociologist Morris Rosenberg defines self-esteem as a feeling of self-worth. Self-esteem is a concept associated with individuals’ mental health and is an important part of one’s overall well-being (Ozyesil, 2012). Self esteem is a personal judgment of worthiness and it is a general personality characteristic (Pervin, 1993). An individual’s concept of self contributes to their enjoyment of life. As experiences in one’s life are a major source of self esteem (olsen, Breckler, Wiggins, 2008) humour and optimism influence the manner in which one perceives a situation. Thus ultimately, self esteem varies with each individual.

An Optimist is one who sees the opportunity in every difficulty and a pessimist is one who sees the difficulty in every opportunity. Optimism can be summed up as the belief that future events are likely to have positive outcomes, no matter what happens. (Yue, Hao & Goldman, 2010). Individuals who hold positive expectations for the future tend to see desired outcomes as attainable and to persist in their goal-directed efforts. In contrast individuals who hold negative expectations for their future tend to assume that bad things will happen and withdraw effort more easily, thus becoming passive and finally giving up on achieving their goals (Scheier & Carver, 1992).

The value of humor is undermined and overseen in our culture. It is viewed as a trivial aspect of one’s self and as a means of entertainment. It has been found that humor, self-esteem,

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optimism, well-being and other self-report measures are interdependent. This study aims at throwing light on the importance of humor in one's life.

Objectives

1. To find the relationship between humour styles, optimism and self-esteem.
2. To find if there is a difference between males and females pertaining to these variables.

Hypotheses

1. There will be no significant relationship between affiliative humor style and optimism.
2. There will be no significant relationship between self-enhancing humor style and optimism.
3. There will be no significant relationship between aggressive humor style and optimism.
4. There will be no significant relationship between self-defeating humor style and optimism.
5. There will be a significant positive relationship between affiliative humor style and self-esteem.
6. There will be a significant positive relationship between self-enhancing humor style and self-esteem.
7. There will be no significant relationship between aggressive humor style and self-esteem.
8. There will be a significant negative relationship between self-defeating humor style and self-esteem.
9. There will be a significant positive relationship between optimism and self-esteem.
10. There will be no difference in affiliative humor style between males and females.
11. There will be no difference in self-enhancing humor style between males and females.
12. There will be no difference in aggressive humor style between males and females.
13. There will be no difference in self-defeating humor style between males and females.
14. There will be no difference in optimism between males and females.
15. There will be no difference in self-esteem between males and females.

METHODOLOGY

The study was ex post-facto in nature, and cross sectional design was used. Questionnaires were distributed online to college students, using the purposive sampling technique. The study included 108 students from colleges around Chennai, out of which 62 were females and 46 were males. The ages ranged from 18 to 25.

Tools used

HSQ- humour styles questionnaire which comprises of 32 items, developed by Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, (2003) was used to assess the four styles humor. The scale comprises of four sub-scales (affiliative humor style, self-enhancing humor style, Aggressive humor style & Self defeating humor style), each one having eight items. The 10-item LOT-R - life orientation test- revised developed by Scheier, Carver, & Bridges (1994) was used to measure optimism while the 10-item self esteem scale by Rosenberg (1965) was

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used to measure self-esteem. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version – 16.0.0 was used. Pearson product moment correlation was used to find out the significant relationship between the variables. Independent 't'- tests was used to compare male and female samples pertaining to the variables.

RESULTS

The relationship between the variables were determined using Pearson product moment correlation and significant differences between genders were computed using 't' test statistics. The tables below show the statistical details.

Table 1 Table shows descriptive statistics

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Affiliative	108	43.97	6.56
Self enhancing	108	34.72	9.35
Aggressive	108	27.18	8.16
Self defeating	108	28.45	8.86
Optimism	108	13.56	4.17
Self esteem	108	19.06	5.93

Table 2 Table shows correlation between variables

Variables	N	Pearson correlation
Affiliative humour style Optimism	108	0.020
Self Enhancing humour Style Optimism	108	0.133
Aggressive humour style Optimism	108	0.096
Self defeating humour style Optimism	108	- 0.008
Affiliative humour style Self esteem	108	0.041
Self enhancing humour style Self esteem	108	0.355**
Aggressive humour style Self esteem	108	- 0.093
Self defeating humour style Self esteem	108	- 0.205*
Optimism Self esteem	108	0.533**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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From the above table, it is observed that there is no significant correlation between affiliative humour style and optimism, $r = 0.020$, therefore the hypothesis “There will be no significant relationship between affiliative humor style and optimism” is failed to be rejected. There is no significant relationship between self enhancing humour style and optimism $r = 0.133$, thus the hypothesis “There will be no significant relationship between self-enhancing humor style and optimism” is failed to be rejected. From the above table, it is observed that there is no significant relationship between aggressive humour style and optimism $r = 0.096$, showing that the hypothesis “There will be no significant relationship between aggressive humor style and optimism” is failed to be rejected. It was found that there was no significant correlation between self defeating humour style and optimism $r = - 0.008$, thus proving that the hypothesis “There will be no significant relationship between self-defeating humor style and optimism” is failed to be rejected. Results show that there is no significant relationship between affiliative humour style and self esteem $r = 0.041$, thus the hypothesis “There will be a significant positive relationship between affiliative humor style and self-esteem” is failed to be rejected. Also, there is no significant relationship between aggressive humour style and self esteem, $r = -0.093$, thus proving that the hypothesis “there will be no significant relationship between aggressive humor style and self-esteem” is failed to be rejected.

From the above table, it is inferred that there is a significant positive correlation between self enhancing humour and self esteem $r = 0.355$, $p < 0.01$, hence the hypothesis “There will be a significant positive relationship between self-enhancing humor style and self-esteem” is failed to be rejected. It is inferred from the above table that there is a significant negative correlation between self defeating humour style and self esteem $r = - 0.205$, $p < 0.05$, hence the hypothesis “There will be a significant negative relationship between self-defeating humor style and self-esteem” is failed to be rejected. Also, it is inferred that there is a significant positive correlation between optimism and self esteem $r = 0.533$, $p < 0.01$, hence the hypothesis “There will be a significant positive relationship between optimism and self-esteem” is failed to be rejected.

Table 10 Table shows significant mean difference on affiliative humour style.

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	“t” value	Significance
Female	46	43.79	7.270	-.35	.73
Male	62	44.22	5.513		

From the above table, it is inferred that there is no difference between males and females in affiliative humour style, $t(106) = .35$, $P < 0.05$. Though there is a mean difference between males and females, it is not statistically significant.

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Table 11 Table shows significant mean difference on self-enhancing humour style.

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	“t” value	Significance
Female	46	35.05	10.006	.43	.67
Male	62	34.28	8.482		

From the above table, it is inferred that there is no difference between males and females in self-enhancing humour style, $t(106) = .43$, $P < 0.05$. Though there is a mean difference between males and females, it is not statistically significant.

Table 12 Table shows significant mean difference on aggressive humour style.

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	“t” value	Significance
Female	46	26.50	8.099	-.99	.32
Male	62	28.09	8.246		

From the above table, it is inferred that there is no difference between males and females in aggressive humour style, $t(106) = .99$, $P < 0.05$. Though there is a mean difference between males and females, it is not statistically significant.

Table 13 Table shows significant mean difference on self-defeating humour style.

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	“t” value	Significance
Female	46	26.84	8.231	-2.19	.03
Male	62	30.63	9.298		

From the above table, it is inferred that there is a significant difference between males and females in self-defeating humour style, $t(106) = 2.19$, $P < 0.05$, with men having higher scores in self-defeating humour.

Table 14 Table shows significant mean difference on optimism.

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	“t” value	Significance
Female	46	13.29	4.075	-.76	.45
Male	62	13.91	4.314		

From the above table, it is inferred that there is no difference between males and females in optimism, $t(106) = .76$, $P < 0.05$. Though there is a mean difference between males and females, it is not statistically significant.

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Table 15 Table shows significant mean difference on self-esteem.

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	“t” value	Significance
Female	46	19.29	6.112	.48	.63
Male	62	18.74	5.737		

From the above table, it is inferred that there is no difference between males and females in self-esteem, $t(106) = .48$, $P < 0.05$. Though there is a mean difference between males and females, it is not statistically significant.

DISCUSSION

Effective use of humour helps in the development of a more positive and healthier self concept (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005). Self enhancing humor involves emotion regulation and coping which helps the individual to face difficulties in life effectively, which in turn leads to the belief that one has the potential to encounter problematic situations, leading to a higher self-esteem. The present study illustrates that there is a relationship between self enhancing humour style and self esteem, which supports the findings of Galloway (2010).

Individuals who are high on self-defeating humor dimension are seen as clever and entertaining, there is however, an element of emotional neediness, avoidance, and low self-esteem underlying their use of humor (Fabrizi & Pollio, 1987). People who utilize the self-defeating style of humour, mask negative feelings and use humor to amuse others at their own cost, preventing them from venting their negative emotions and thoughts. This may lead to accumulation of negative concepts about self, resulting in lower self-esteem.

Self-esteem is a result of various experiences throughout life. Higher self-esteem is a product of the belief that one has the ability to endure taxing circumstances. People with higher self-esteem view their failures as stepping stones to success. This, leaves them with the impression that most outcomes might turn out to be positive. Which leads them to a positive outlook towards life. Thus, people with higher self-esteem tend to be optimistic.

In Indian culture, men are considered as breadwinners of the family. Therefore, early in life, their efficiency to handle situations becomes the target of criticism for their parent figures as well the society. Men are not encouraged to show their sadness because it is very unmanly to do so. Without an effective way to vent out their emotions, they joke at their own expense, which appears to be charming and is encouraged. The greater tendency of males to engage in these presumably deleterious styles of humor is consistent with some previous evidence that men engage in more potentially maladaptive forms of humor than do women (Crawford & Gressley, 1991; Lefcourt, Davidson, Prkachin, & Mills, 1997; Martin & Kuiper, 1999)

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The possible reason as to why this study was unable to find significant relationships between affiliative humour style and optimism, self-enhancing humor style and optimism, aggressive humour style and optimism, self-defeating humour style and optimism, affiliative humour style and self-esteem as well as aggressive humour style and optimism, may be due to the fact that the study consisted of a relatively small number of samples from a limited range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. A larger and more diverse sample is required to generalize the present conclusions. This would include people from different walks of life.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors colorfully declare this paper to bear not conflict of interests

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