

Humor Styles and Emotional Intelligence among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to find the relation between the various styles humor styles and emotional intelligence among young adults. This study included 241 participants (109 males and 132 females). The results of the study revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between affiliative humor and all the dimensions of emotional intelligence. There was a significant positive relationship between self-enhancing humor and all the dimensions of emotional intelligence. There was a significant negative correlation between aggressive humor and all the dimensions of emotional intelligence except for managing one's own emotions. Also, there was a significant gender difference in the usage of aggressive humor styles, where males use more aggressive humor than females.

Keywords: *Humor Styles, Emotional Intelligence, Young Adults*

Humor has been part of our culture for as long as mankind has. The use of humor cannot always mean an individual's balanced psychological functioning. Certain types of humor are more optimistic than the others. There are four types of humor and they are the following (Martin, 2003): 1. Affiliative humor: this style is made up of jokes that anyone would find amusing. These involve jokes that anyone can relate to, which are intended to build a sense of friendship, fun and well-being among them. These people are very happy to embrace themselves and others. 2. Self-enhancing humor: this involves being able to make jokes about one's personal life when something bad happens to him or her. They still strive to see fun in everything that happens to them in their everyday lives in a positive way. It's a safe way to deal with stress. Those people have a very high self-esteem and always try to be positive. And if their lives become difficult, they still manage to find the silver lining and make the most out of it. 3. Aggressive humor: this style includes a person degrading others, and can appear to inflict some sort of psychological damage to the individual in question. This style is widely recognized by bullies and often contains humorous remarks. While some people might find those jokes amusing, some people might just chuckle at it to cover up their sense of social anxiety. Although such people might find their jokes a playful way to convey their opinions, others might find it offensive in nature. 4. Self-defeating humor: this means telling stories that insult or degrade one's self. This type of humor is mentally detrimental to health and is a typical tactic used by the victims of violent attacks to save themselves from harm. This approach appears to expose the insecurities of

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the person who's telling the joke. People who follow such a style may appear to find the acceptance of others and may doubt themselves the legitimacy of their problems. If something bad happens to someone like this, they want to cover it up by letting someone joke about it. Several studies have shown that our humor styles have some sort of relation with emotional intelligence and its various sub-dimensions. (Reisoglu & Yazici, 2017; Karahan et al., 2019)

Emotional Intelligence (EI) refers to the capacity to interpret, regulate and measure emotions (Cherry, 2020). Some scholars claim that emotional intelligence can be learned and improved, while others contend that it is an inborn trait. Researchers believe that there are four distinct levels of emotional intelligence, which includes emotional perception, the capacity to reason with feelings, the ability to comprehend emotions, and the ability to control emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1990). 1. Perceiving feelings: the first step in recognizing emotions is to interpret them specifically. In certain cases, these can include interpreting non-verbal signs such as body language and facial expressions. 2. Reasoning feelings: The next step includes using emotions to facilitate thought and cognitive function. Emotions help give preference to what we pay attention to and respond to; we respond emotionally to items that draw our attention. 3. Understanding feelings: the emotions that we experience may have a wide range of interpretations. If anyone shows angry feelings, the listener may interpret the origin of the person's rage and what it may indicate. 4. Managing emotions: The capacity to control feelings efficiently is a vital part of emotional maturity at the highest level. Regulating feelings and reacting correctly as well as responding to other people's emotions are all important facets of emotional regulation.

The styles of humor might be connected to underlying emotions. Similarly, there have been studies saying that positive humor styles such as affiliative humor and self-enhancing humor have a positive relation with emotional intelligence and negative humor styles such as aggressive humor and self-defeating humor have a negative relation with emotional intelligence (Karahan et al., 2019; Reisoglu & Yazici, 2017). Talking about gender differences, 'men use aggressive and self-defeating humor styles more often than women; older individuals use less often affiliative and aggressive humor styles than younger individuals' (Martin et al., 2003). Also a few studies have looked into the gender differences in humor styles, and it was seen that males tend to use more of maladaptive humor and females tend to use more of adaptive humor. (Alinia et al., 2009). In the case of emotional intelligence, women seemed to score more than men in emotional intelligence scales (Karahan et al., 2019). Thus, it is reasonable to say that emotional intelligence can be explained by humor styles. Implementing positive and adaptive humor styles such as affiliative and self-enhancing in regulating and utilizing emotions of one's self can help individuals manage and control their own emotions appropriately and use it to solve problems effectively. In fact a few studies show that trait emotional intelligence is related to the adaptive styles of humor, and is also related to the reduced usage of maladaptive humor styles. (Gignac et al., 2014; Greven et al., 2008; Vernon et al., 2009). The young adult population is the future of any country and it is important for them to have a good level of emotional intelligence. Thus, based on previous studies we can say that using positive and adaptive styles of humor can in some way lead them to have a good level of emotional intelligence and thus help them in managing and controlling their emotions efficiently and effectively use it to solve their daily problems. In order to implement this in the young adult population of India, it is important to check the relation between humor styles and emotional intelligence in this sample.

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Related literature gives us an idea about how the various styles of humor are related to emotional intelligence and its sub-dimensions. Based on which, we can understand that positive humor styles such as affiliative humor and self-enhancing humor have a positive relation with emotional intelligence and negative humor styles such as aggressive humor and self-defeating humor have a negative relation with emotional intelligence. Also a few studies have looked into the gender differences in humor styles, and it was seen that males tend to use more of aggressive humor and females tend to use more of affiliative humor. In the case of emotional intelligence, women seemed to score more than men in emotional intelligence scales. Most of these studies have not taken place in the Indian setting. So, this study may help in verifying this in the Indian setting and also to check if there are significant gender differences in their preferences for a style of humor. Similarly, there have been no studies that aim to study the young adult population in particular on the same grounds.

METHODOLOGY

Correlational study was done using convenience sampling. This study was conducted on males and females between the age range of 18-25.

Objectives

- To find the scores emotional intelligence dimensions of the sample.
- To examine the gender difference in emotional intelligence dimensions.
- To find the distribution of humor styles in the sample.
- To find the gender differences in the usage of humor styles.
- To find the correlation between the dimensions of emotional intelligence and humor styles.

Hypotheses

H01: There will be no significant gender differences in the usage of humor styles.

H02: There will be no significant gender difference in emotional intelligence dimensions.

H03: There will be no significant correlation between the dimensions of emotional intelligence and humor styles.

Participants

A sample of 241 young adults (n=), 109 males and 132 females between the age range of 18-25 from various parts of India was taken for the study based on the exclusion and inclusion criteria of the study. Convenience sampling was used for collecting the sample which is a type of non-probability sampling that involves the sample being drawn from that part of the population that is close to hand.

Tools used for the study

1. **Humor Styles Questionnaire (Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, and Weir, 2003).** The Humor Styles Questionnaire is a 32- item scale which measures two positive and two negative dimensions of humor, describing various methods in which humor might be experienced. These 32 items are further divided into 4 humor styles. The questionnaire showed a good level of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha: .80 for Affiliative and Self-Defeating, .77 for Aggressive, and .81 for Self-Enhancing Humor). The correlations between the scales tended to be very poor, varying from .12 to .36, suggesting their independence. Test-retest reliability ranged from .80 to .85.

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- 2. The Assessing Emotions Scale (Nicola S. Schutte, 2009).** The Assessing Emotions Scale is a 33-item self-report inventory that reflects on the typical emotional intelligence. The internal test consistency of the scale was 0.87 for a diverse sample. The reliability of this scale was studied using test-retest reliability and it was found to be .78. The validity of the scale was found in relation to EQ-I which is another self-report measure of emotional intelligence and it was found to be $r = .43$.
- 3. Socio-demographic data sheet** The socio-demographic data sheet includes information such as name, age, and gender.

Procedure

The participants in this study were selected based on the inclusion-exclusion criteria. Informed consent was obtained from all the respondents before collecting the data. Two questionnaires regarding the humor style and emotional intelligence were administered to them along with the socio-demographic data sheet. The scale was administered to the participants through Google Forms. The respondents were given assurance based on the ethical guidelines of this study as well.

RESULTS

Affiliative humor style was used the most by the sample.

Aggressive humor was used the least by the sample.

There was a significant gender difference in the usage of aggressive humor styles, where males use more aggressive humor than females.

Table 1: Mann-Whitney U test results showing gender differences in humor styles

Dimension	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sig. value	Mann-Whitney U
Affiliative Humor	Female	132	120.86	0.97	7175.000
	Male	109	121.17		
Self-enhancing Humor	Female	132	120.04	0.80	7067.000
	Male	109	122.17		
Aggressive Humor	Female	132	104.86	0.00	5063.000
	Male	109	140.55		
Self-defeating Humor	Female	132	115.45	0.14	6461.000
	Male	109	127.72		

- There was no significant gender difference seen based on emotional intelligence.
- There was a significant positive relationship between affiliative humor and all the dimensions of emotional intelligence.
- There was a significant positive relationship between self-enhancing humor and all the dimensions of emotional intelligence.
- There was a significant negative correlation between aggressive humor and all the dimensions of emotional intelligence except for managing one's own emotions.
- There was no significant positive or negative correlation for self-defeating humor with any of the dimensions of emotional intelligence.

Table 2: Spearman’s correlation between the dimensions of humor styles and emotional intelligence

	Affiliative Humor	Self-enhancing Humor	Aggressive Humor	Self-defeating Humor
Perception of emotions	.278**	.165*	-.166**	-.118
Managing One's own emotions	.162*	.274**	-.105	-.126
Managing Other's emotions	.300**	.239**	-.142*	-.046
Utilizing emotions	.155*	.308**	-.157*	-.012

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

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

DISCUSSION

From table 1, it was understood that only aggressive humor styles has a significant difference with the p value as 0.00 and it was seen that males tend to use more aggressive humor than females. Affiliative humor, self-enhancing humor, and self-defeating humor does not have a significant difference based on gender. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected and we can say that there is a significant gender difference in aggressive humor style. In a study by Karahan et al, (2019) and Alinia et al, (2009) it was seen that males are seen to use more of aggressive humor and females are seen to use more of affiliative humor. Comparing their result to the result obtained in this study, we can understand that even though there was a significant gender difference in the usage of aggressive humor, the usage of affiliative humor is more or less similar between both males and females.

From table 2, we can understand that there was a significant positive relationship between affiliative humor and all the dimensions of emotional intelligence, self-enhancing humor and all the dimensions of emotional intelligence. There was a significant negative correlation between aggressive humor and all the dimensions of emotional intelligence except for managing one’s own emotions. There was no signification positive or negative correlation for self-defeating humor with any of the dimensions of emotional intelligence. Thus the null hypothesis was rejected. There have been studies saying that positive humor styles such as affiliative humor and self-enhancing humor have a positive relation with emotional intelligence and negative humor styles such as aggressive humor and self-defeating humor have a negative relation with emotional intelligence (Karahan et al., 2019; Reisoglu & Yazici, 2017). In this study even though there was a negative correlation seen, it is not significant at 0.01 level or 0.05 level, thus the only difference between this study and previous literature is that there is no significant relationship between self-defeating humor and emotional intelligence dimensions.

CONCLUSION

According to the findings of this study there was a significant gender difference in the usage of aggressive humor styles, where males use more aggressive humor than females. Thus efforts can be taken in training the male population to switch to more positive styles of humor such as affiliative or self-enhancing humor styles. This study constituted of the following limitations as well transgender samples were not taken in this study so the results cannot be generalized to the whole young adult population. The sample (N=241) included responses from all over India and thus is a small number in order to generalize the results. Social desirability could play a major role in affecting the results as the study uses self-report questionnaires. The questionnaires were circulated online so this also could have

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affected the concentration of participant resulting in inaccurate responses. More studies with a larger sample size can be conducted on the same variables within the Indian setting so that the results can be generalized to a wider population.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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