

Research Paper

## Emotional Maturity, Humor Styles, and Relationship Adjustment in Married and Unmarried Young Adults: A Correlational Study

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### ABSTRACT

Research shows that emotional maturity and humor style are closely related, as individuals with great emotional maturity tend to use an adaptive humor style. Emotional maturity also significantly influences how individuals navigate conflicts, communicate, and maintain long-term commitments; hence, it highly influences relationship stability. This study aimed to explore and understand these relationships in both married and unmarried couples. Data was collected from 60 couples (120 individuals) through snowball sampling. Three scales, Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ), Emotional Maturity Scale (EMS), and Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), were used to collect data. The research was only on adaptive humor style. As such, out of the 60 couples, 22 married and 26 unmarried couples were taken, and 54 females and 50 males who portrayed adaptive humor style were taken. For statistical analysis of the data Spearman's correlation-coefficient was calculated for studying relationship between variables. It was found that emotional maturity was correlated with relationship adjustment in both male and female samples along with married and unmarried samples. Emotional maturity was correlated with humor in both married and unmarried samples. Further research may be done across a larger sample and various cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** *Emotional Maturity, Humor, Romantic Relationships*

In this era where many of the young adults face challenges of emotional turbulence, to regulate our negative emotions using emotional maturity is very important. It not just helps you with your decision making but also reduces stress and conflicts. It makes you more self-aware such that you can identify your emotional triggers, and behavioural patterns or tendencies. Having emotional maturity gives you the ability to understand each other's emotions or perspectives and hence improves your relationship quality by strengthening emotional intimacy with your partner. And as an impact of this, it makes your relationship highly stable. Though there are other factors also but emotional maturity has always been counted in one of the major factors to measure relationship quality or stability. In a way or other, stability in a relationship comes from adjustment made within it by both the partners such as for a conflict resolution both the partners adjust with their demands to land onto a common conclusion. Apart from emotional maturity, humor also has a significant role in stability of romantic relationships & conflict resolution. It is assumed that any two

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individuals who can laugh together will tend to stay together for a longer duration. As humans are considered to be social beings, humor has vital role in our daily life, from initiating a conversation to establishing and maintaining a relationship.

The capability to understand and manage our emotions effectively is called Emotional maturity (Singh & Bhargava, 1990). It helps individuals deal with complex social environments and maintain healthy relationships. It involves emotional regulation, empathy, resilience, and the capacity to respond to situations in a socially appropriate manner (Singh & Bhargava, 2012). In my understanding, an emotionally mature individual exhibits self-awareness, recognizing their emotional states and understanding their impact on behaviour. They demonstrate self-regulation by managing impulses and coping with stress constructively. Such individuals exhibit empathy and resilience that contribute to better decision-making, effective communication, and the ability to sustain fulfilling relationships.

The regular tendencies people use humor in their daily lives, influencing both personal well-being and interactions we do socially are referred as Humor styles (Martin et al.,2003). It identifies four distinct humor styles, namely, “Affiliative Humor, Self-Enhancing Humor, Aggressive Humor, and Self-Defeating Humor” (Martin et al.,2003).

**Affiliative Humor** includes the form of humor like, telling jokes and involving in sudden, in order to make others entertained and laughing in daily conversation. Thus, this enhances quality of relations and reduces relationship conflicts. Individuals employing affiliative humor often use it to facilitate social interactions and strengthen bonds.

In **Self-Defeating Humor** style, a person manifests a self-disparaging humor where they make themselves the butt of jokes to gain support of other individuals. A poor self-esteem depicted by the people of this humor style, also it is highly associated with psychological distress.

**Self-Enhancing Humor** is defined as a view of life in a humorous way. This style creates positive point of view, especially during stress and hence helps in its management. It exhibits an individual's ability to find humor in everyday situations and possibly use it as a coping mechanism.

**Aggressive Humor** is associate with sarcastic way of humor, mocking, and lampooning, often at the expense of others. It is generally reported that aggressive humor may harm relationships and hostile aggression is highly associated with this style of humor.

**Relationship adjustment** can be defined as the process by which partners in a romantic relationship adapt to each other to maintain a healthy and satisfying partnership with each other. Effective relationship adjustment is crucial for the longevity and satisfaction of romantic partnerships. High adjustment is characterized by mutual respect, effective communication, and shared values, leading to a stable and fulfilling relationship. Conversely, poor adjustment can lead to conflicts, dissatisfaction, and potential dissolution of the partnership.

### **EMOTIONAL MATURITY AND HUMOR STYLES**

The studies shows that emotional maturity and humor style are closely related as humor not only serves as a coping style but also as a social communication tool. People with higher

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degree of emotional maturity manifests Adaptive humor style that is self-enhancing & affiliative humor style which enhance social bonding (Martin et al., 2003), and people with poor emotional maturity manifests maladaptive humor style that is self-defeating & aggressive humor which can lead to interpersonal conflicts (Furnham & Petrides, 2003). Researchers also suggest that emotionally mature individuals can regulate their emotions better and use their humor to maintain positive social interaction.

### **HUMOR STYLE AND RELATIONSHIP STABILITY**

Various Studies showed that, humor style has a vital role in stability of relationships. An adaptive humor style positively influences relationship satisfaction by promoting emotional closeness and reducing conflicts (Hall, 2017), while a Maladaptive humor style is linked to lower relationship stability as it can lead to misunderstanding and resentment between partners (Saroglou et al., 2010). Studies also indicate that shared humor strengthens bonds, enhancing mutual understanding and support (Kurtz & Algoe, 2015). Additionally, partners who use positive humor styles report higher relationship quality and long-term commitment (Butzer & Kuiper, 2008).

### **EMOTIONAL MATURITY AND RELATIONSHIP STABILITY**

As emotional maturity significantly influences how individuals navigate conflicts, communicate, and maintain long-term commitments, it highly influences relationship stability (Branje et al., 2009). Researches also indicate that emotionally mature individuals are less likely to engage in impulsive or avoidant behaviour (Knee et al., 2013), and partners with higher emotional intelligence tend to foster secure attachment styles, enhancing mutual trust and emotional security in relationships (Zeidner et al., 2012).

### ***Rationale of the Study***

Research suggests that different humor styles impact emotional maturity and relational dynamics in distinct ways (Martin et al., 2003; Cann & Collette, 2014). Also, emotional maturity, which encompasses self-awareness, impulse control, & the capability to monitor, regulate our emotions efficiently, is a crucial role in a satisfied and well-adjusted relationship (Goleman, 1995). Even relationship adjustment is influenced by both humor style and emotional regulation (Campbell et al., 2008).

While previous studies have explored these variables individually, there is limited research examination done in the interplay within the context of marital and non-marital relationships. Since married individuals often experience different relational challenges and coping mechanisms compared to unmarried individuals (Barelds & Dijkstra, 2010), it is essential to investigate a correlational approach for identifying the relationships between emotional maturity, humor styles, and relationship adjustment across marital status groups. By this, the study aims to provide deeper insight into how psychological traits influence relationship dynamics between married and unmarried couples.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Objectives:***

- O1: To study the relationship between emotional maturity and humor styles.
- O2: To study the relationship between emotional maturity and relationship stability.

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### *Hypothesis:*

- H1: Emotional maturity will positively correlate with Adaptive humor styles in married couples.
- H2: Emotional maturity will positively correlate with Adaptive humor styles in unmarried couples.
- H3: Emotional maturity will positively correlate with relationship adjustment in married couples.
- H4: Emotional maturity will positively correlate with relationship adjustment in unmarried couples.
- H5: Emotional maturity will positively correlate with relationship adjustment in females that portray Adaptive humor styles
- H6: Emotional maturity will positively correlate with relationship adjustment in males that portray Adaptive humor styles.

### *Sample*

- Snowball Sampling Method used in the study, over 60 couples participated in the study in which 30 married and 30 unmarried couples across different cities of India, from them 48 couples were selected in which both the partners portrayed Adaptive humor styles sub-divided as 22 married and 26 unmarried couples.
- From the 120 individuals (60 males and 60 females) that participated in the study, 54 females out of 60 portrayed Adaptive humor styles, and 50 males out of 60 portrayed Adaptive humor styles.
- The criteria for the couples to participate in the study was that they should have maintained the relationship continuously for more than 1 year, and each one of them should fall under the 20- 44 years age.

### *Variables:*

Emotional maturity, Relationship stability, and Humor style

### *Instruments Used in the Study:*

- **The Emotional Maturity Scale** (Singh and Bhargava, 1990)- The EMS is used in this study which was developed by Singh and Bhargava (1990). In this scale 48-item designed to measure a person's emotional development and regulation abilities. It evaluates how well individuals cope with stress, interpersonal conflicts, and emotional challenges. This scale consists of 5 subscales which are, Lack of Independence, Emotional Regression, Emotional Instability, Personality Disintegration, & Social Maladjustment, each of the scale assess different aspects of emotional maturity. The participants are supposed to give their responses in a Likert Scale of 5 pointers The higher scores indicate high degree of emotional immaturity. This scale having good psychometric properties and the method and values of reliability are- Test-retest reliability of 0.79 & Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.75 to 0.84. It also shows strong construct validity, correlating significantly with psychological distress and emotional intelligence measures (Singh and Bhargava, 1990).
- **The Humor Styles Questionnaire** (Martin et al., 2003)- HSQ is used in the study, this questionnaire is developed by Martin and his colleagues in 2003, This test consists of 32 items and it is a self-report measure scale, which was designed to measure differences in humor use among people. It has four sub-category of humor

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which are, Self-Defeating (self-deprecating humor that may be harmful), Aggressive humor (used to criticize or manipulate others), Self-Enhancing humor (used as a coping mechanism), & Affiliative humor (used to strengthen social bonds). Each category contains 8 items assessing different humor styles (Martin et al., 2003). The participants can respond to Likert scale of 7 pointers. The high scores indicate a higher tendencies towards that humor style. This test has good psychometric properties with the reliability methods and their values are- test-retest reliability of 0.80 and 0.85 over 3 months & Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.77 to 0.81. It also shows strong construct validity, correlating with personality traits, well-being, and relationship quality (Martin et al., 2003).

- **Dyadic Adjustment Scale (1976) by Spanier-** This test was developed by Spanier in 1976. This test has 32 items which assess satisfaction in a romantic relationship and adjustment in both married and unmarried couples (Spanier, 1976). This scale contains 4 subscales, which are, Affectional Expression (reflecting how often partners show love and affection), Dyadic Cohesion (assessing emotional closeness and shared activities), Dyadic Satisfaction (measures overall happiness and commitment), & Dyadic Consensus (which evaluates agreement on key relationship aspects like finances and parenting). The participants are supposed to respond on a Likert scale of 1-6. The high scores represent good relationship quality ranging from 0 to 151. This scale has excellent psychometric properties. The reliability methods and their values are, test-retest correlations between 0.80 and 0.86. & Cronbach's alpha of 0.90. Its strong construct validity is supported by significant correlations with other relationship satisfaction measures and its ability to predict marital stability (Spanier, 1976).

### *Statistical Analysis*

The statistical analysis was done by using SPSS version 27.0 and Spearman's correlation-coefficient was used to determine relationships among our research variables.

### *Procedure*

Data collection was done through in-person interaction with the participants in pen and paper mode. Three scales, Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ), Emotional Maturity Scale (EMS), and Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), were used to collect data through the snowball technique. Out of 60 couples (120 individuals), 48 couples were selected such that both the partners portray Adaptive humor styles within them. These couples were subdivided into 22 married couples and 26 unmarried couples. The overall individuals were also categorised in 54 out of 60 females and 50 out of 60 males such that all of them portray Adaptive humor style in them. Descriptive statistics and Spearman's correlation-coefficient were used for statistical analysis as data collected didn't met the assumptions of parametric tests. Data analysis was done using SPSS Version 27.0. After this hypothesis was to be tested.

## **RESULTS**

Correlational analysis was performed between relationship adjustment, emotional maturity and humor style. The emotional maturity scale is inversely calculated so that a higher score indicates lower emotional maturity. As such positive correlational coefficient shows an inversed relationship, and negative correlational coefficients show a direct relationship. Among the calculated correlational coefficients, it was found that among married couples, emotional maturity was positively correlated to humor style ( $r = -0.432$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) & relationship adjustment ( $r = -0.568$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Among unmarried couples, emotional

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maturity was inversely correlated to humor style ( $r = 0.395$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and positively correlated to relationship adjustment ( $r = -0.689$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

In the male sample, emotional maturity was found to be positively correlated with only relationship adjustment ( $r = -0.398$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Similarly, in the female sample, emotional maturity was found to be positively correlated with only relationship adjustment ( $r = -0.502$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 1: Correlation values of married sample**

			HUMOUR_STYLE _NEW	DAS_COUPLE_S CORE	DAS_SC ORE	EMS_SC ORE
Spearman's rho	HUMOUR_STYLE _NEW	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.201	0.053	-.432**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.154	0.710	0.001
		N	52	52	52	52
	DAS_COUPLE_SC ORE	Correlation Coefficient	0.201	1.000	.887**	-.568**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.154		0.000	0.000
		N	52	52	52	52
	DAS_SCORE	Correlation Coefficient	0.053	.887**	1.000	-.473**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.710	0.000		0.000
		N	52	52	52	52
	EMS_SCORE	Correlation Coefficient	-.432**	-.568**	-.473**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0.000	0.000	
		N	52	52	52	52

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

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**Table 2: Correlation values of unmarried sample**

			HUMOUR_STYLE_NEW	DAS_COUPLE_SCORE	DAS_SCORE	EMS_SCORE
Spearman's rho	HUMOUR_STYLE_NEW	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-0.270	-.327*	.395**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.052	0.018	0.004
		N	52	52	52	52
	DAS_COUPLE_SCORE	Correlation Coefficient	-0.270	1.000	.873**	-.689**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.052		0.000	0.000
		N	52	52	52	52
	DAS_SCORE	Correlation Coefficient	-.327*	.873**	1.000	-.733**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.018	0.000		0.000
		N	52	52	52	52
	EMS_SCORE	Correlation Coefficient	.395**	-.689**	-.733**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.004	0.000	0.000	
		N	52	52	52	52

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).  
 \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 3: Correlation values of male sample**

			HUMOUR_STYLE_NEW	DAS_COUPLE_SCORE	DAS_SCORE	EMS_SCORE
Spearman's rho	HUMOUR_STYLE_NEW	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-0.017	-0.106	-0.100
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.909	0.466	0.490
		N	50	50	50	50
	DAS_COUPLE_SCORE	Correlation Coefficient	-0.017	1.000	.853**	-.399**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.909		0.000	0.004
		N	50	50	50	50
	DAS_SCORE	Correlation Coefficient	-0.106	.853**	1.000	-.398**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.466	0.000		0.004
		N	50	50	50	50
	EMS_SCORE	Correlation Coefficient	-0.100	-.399**	-.398**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.490	0.004	0.004	
		N	50	50	50	50

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

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**Table 4: Correlation values of female sample.**

Spearman's rho	HUMOUR_STYLE_NEW	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-0.015	-0.146	0.111
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.913	0.291	0.424
		N	54	54	54	54
DAS_COUPLE_SCORE	DAS_COUPLE_SCORE	Correlation Coefficient	-0.015	1.000	.909**	-.581**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.913		0.000	0.000
		N	54	54	54	54
DAS_SCORE	DAS_SCORE	Correlation Coefficient	-0.146	.909**	1.000	-.502**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.291	0.000		0.000
		N	54	54	54	54
EMS_SCORE	EMS_SCORE	Correlation Coefficient	0.111	-.581**	-.502**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.424	0.000	0.000	
		N	54	54	54	54

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

## DISCUSSION

Various psychological studies have looked extensively at humor styles, emotional maturity, and relationship adjustment, especially in terms of their influence on romantic relationships. Relationships have been shown to require humor as a crucial instrument for social bonding and conflict resolution (Martin et al., 2003). Maintaining relationship stability depends much on emotional maturity since it influence how people deal emotional expressions and interpersonal conflicts (Sharma & Sharma, 2015). Both humor styles and emotional control have been related to relationship adjustment, a key sign of relationship quality (Campbell et al., 2005). Previous research has shown that adaptive humor styles—such as affiliative and self-enhancing humor—positively support relationship satisfaction (Cann et al., 2008). These humor styles promote intimacy, lower interpersonal tension, and help people handle stress (Kurtz & Algoe, 2015). Conversely, maladaptive humor styles—including aggressive and self-defeating humor—have been linked to relationship dissatisfaction and increased conflict levels (Saroglou et al., 2010). Among the participant couples, four couples showed a maladaptive humor style and eight couples showed alternate adaptive/maladaptive humor styles. Such couples were left out of the study. The results indicate that in married couples, humor style was positively related with emotional maturity ( $r = -0.395$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), implying that higher emotional maturity engaged less in humor styles. These results imply a different effect of humor styles in married and unmarried relationships. Emotional maturity has been linked to healthier relationship dynamics, as individuals with greater emotional stability exhibit better conflict resolution and greater empathy (Murray et al., 2011). Previous studies have shown that emotional immaturity often leads to impulsive reactions, increased relationship dissatisfaction, and poor communication (Branje et al., 2007). The current study supports these findings, as emotional maturity was significantly correlated with relationship adjustment in both married ( $r = -0.568$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and unmarried ( $r = -0.689$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) couples.

According to research by Fincham and Linfield (1997), emotional intelligence was found to be a significant predictor of marital satisfaction. This suggests that people with higher emotional maturity (lower EMS scores) had better relationship adjustment. Relationship

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satisfaction and emotional control may differ between men and women, according to research. Relationship quality is generally improved by women's greater emotional intelligence and more candid emotional expression (Brackett et al., 2006). But men frequently use humor as a coping strategy, which may have a different effect on the stability of their relationships (Hall, 2017).

In both male ( $r = -0.398$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ) and female ( $r = 0.502$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ) samples, the results of the present study show that emotional maturity was favorably correlated with relationship adjustment. In either gender, though, there was no appreciable correlation between humor style and relationship adjustment. This runs counter to some earlier research, such as Campbell et al. (2005), which claimed men's relationship satisfaction is more influenced by humor. Since most participants in this study presented adaptive humor styles, the homogeneity of the sample may be the reason behind the lack of relevance in humor styles inside the male and female subgroups. According to several studies, married and unmarried couples have rather different relationship dynamics. Long-term commitment and shared responsibilities help married couples show more stability and foster greater emotional maturity (Amato & Previti, 2003). On the other hand, unmarried couples might have more variations in emotional reactions and relationship commitments (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006).

### *Limitations And Suggestions*

This research work contributes significant insights into the correlation between emotional maturity, humor-styles, and relationship adjustment, it is essential to acknowledge limitations. First the size of the sample is relatively small, so the generalizing ability of our findings got affected; hence, the future researches have a scope and it is suggested that they should include a larger sample size to strengthen the findings. Secondly, the research was conducted within a particular geographical or cultural setting, which may restrict its generalizability to other regions. Comparative studies with cross-sectional designs would be favourable to determine the extent to which the findings are universal.

Furthermore, this study may not consider other factors that could affect the outcomes, leading to biased results. Future studies should consider a wider array of variables to obtain a more holistic view. Finally, time constraints and resource limitations may have restricted the depth of the analysis. Subsequent studies with extended time frames and improved resources could further broaden the scope of initial findings.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings within the study indicate that among married couples, emotional maturity was significantly correlated with both humor style and relationship adjustment, whereas in unmarried couples, emotional maturity showed an inverse relationship with humor style. The divergence suggests that humor may play different roles in relationship adjustment depending on marital status, possibly because married individuals rely more on humor as a mechanism to maintain relationship harmony, whereas unmarried individuals might not integrate humor as strongly into their relational dynamics. This study highlights how these factors interact differently in married and unmarried couples and, hence, contributes to the literature. Consistent with the previous research, the findings confirm that emotional maturity is a crucial factor in relationship adjustment. However, the differential role of humor styles in married and unmarried couples suggests that humor may be more relevant to relational stability within the context of long-term commitment. Future research should

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explore the causal mechanisms underlying these relationships and examine how cultural factors influence the humor-emotional maturity dynamic in relationships.

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

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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