

A Pilot Study: Humor and Creativity

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ABSTRACT

Although the literature mentions the indirect relationship between humor and creativity, there is limited evidence that exposure to humorous objects improves directly creative performance. Moreover, the role of humor in the relationship between creativity and various personality traits is also unclear. For addressing this issue, a total of 53 subjects participated in this study. Humorous images (cartoons) were shown to the participants prior to the creativity task. There were no images in the control group. Findings revealed that the participants receiving humorous images were more creative. Furthermore, while the extraversion enhanced creativity in the control group, there was no effect in the humor group. In other words, the humor overshadowed the effect of extraversion. One of the contributions of the current study to the literature is that it is one of few studies that examine the effect of humor on creativity. In addition, the effect of humor on the relationship between extraversion and creativity has become apparent.

Keywords: *Brainstorming, Cartoon, Creativity, Extraversion, Humor.*

Creativity is a process which consists of definition, consideration, and solution of the problem (Amabile, 1983). Generation of new ideas is a key element for all this creative process (Paulus & Nijstad, 2003). Therefore, Osborn (1957) proposed brainstorming technique for enhancing new ideas. Brainstorming encourages people to increase qualified ideas by producing as many ideas as possible without concern for quality (Coskun, Paulus, Brown, & Sherwood, 2000; Paulus & Yang, 2000). From then on, researchers have been interested in enhancing brainstorming performance, which, in turn, creativity, and have been curious about the underlying mechanism of it. For example, various factors such as cognitive stimulation, music, and odor contribute to creative performance (Akben & Coşkun, 2018; Gültepe & Coskun, 2016). In addition to these external factors, there is a direct relationship between personality traits and creativity (Coşkun & Şenyurt, 2015). One of these personality traits is also the sense of humor because it is a stable personality trait (Martin, Puhlik-Doris,

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Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003). However, the relationship between humor and creativity is not clear yet.

There are many humor studies in the literature. Especially scale studies that assess the sense of humor are very common (Craik, Lampert, & Nelson, 1996; Martin, 1996; Martin & Lefcourt, 1984; Svebak, 1996; Thorson & Powell, 1993). When it comes to the relationship between humor and creativity, it is described as an indirect interaction. Among the essential things for creative processes are positive mood and interpersonal relationships. The positive effects of humor on these affect creative process (Eliav, Spektor, & Bear, 2016; Jeder, 2015; Lussier, Grégoire, & Vachon, 2017). That is, the effect of humor on creativity is an indirect effect. However, there are studies indicating that exposure to the humor objects directly influences creativity (e.g. Ziv, 1976). On the other hand, some studies demonstrated that creativity affects the sense of humor (e.g. Murdock & Ganim, 1993).

One of the purposes of the study is to examine the direct effect of humor on creativity. This is because there are limited numbers of studies in the context. Another purpose is to investigate possible third variables in this relationship. In particular, there is a high correlation between extraversion and creativity (Furnham & Bachtiar, 2008; Wolfradt & Pretz, 2001). Taking into consideration that the sense of humor is a personality trait and interact with creativity, it is possible that extraversion also have an effect on this relationship. In this context, new findings will be added to the literature.

Hypotheses

1. We hypothesized that the humor would enhance creativity. This is because there are so many studies indicating the relation between humor and creativity (Eliav et al., 2016; Jeder, 2015; Lussier et al., 2017). The positive and relaxed atmosphere that humor will provide may contribute to the creative processes.
2. The second hypothesis was that while the extraversion would enhance creativity in the participants in the control group, there would be no effect on the participants receiving humor objects. It seemed reasonable to expect that exposure to humor objects would reduce the effect of extraversion on creativity.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A total of 53 subjects participated in this study for an experimental credit. The range of their ages was from 18 to 23. The participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: control and humor.

Instruments

1. **Basic Personality Traits Inventory (BPTI):** BPTI aiming to measure the basic personality traits is a 45-item and 6-factor inventory (Gençöz & Öncül, 2012). These factors are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, neuroticism, and negative valance.
2. **Cartoons:** As a result of preliminary studies, four cartoons were selected by five experts. On average, all cartoons have similar funniness.

- 3. Idea Generation (Creativity Task):** The participants were asked how many ways a cup of water could be used. For example, objects such as pencil boxes and candle holders are considered as ideas. The total time is five minutes.

Procedure

Firstly, all the participants were handed out the informed consent. Then the participants filled the BPTI. Cartoons were shown in the humor group before the creativity task. Lastly, the participants performed the creativity task.

RESULTS

We investigated the effect of humor on the number of creative ideas. The number of ideas was significantly different between the control and the humor conditions, $t(51) = 2.45, p = .02, d = .67$. The creativity scores of participants in humor condition ($M = 8.69, SD = 3.88$) was higher than those in control condition ($M = 6.59, SD = 2.15$). The participants receiving cartoons were more creative. Means and standard deviations are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Conditions	Mean	SD
Control	6.59	2.15
Humor	8.69	3.88

Moreover, we investigated the relationship between creativity and personality traits. The only extraversion was significantly correlated with creativity. However, this correlation is not significant in humor condition. Pearson correlation scores are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlations between the number of ideas and extraversion

Control Condition	Humor Condition	Total
.43*	.19	.30*

* $p < .05$

In regression analysis, extraversion increased idea generation in the control condition, $b = 1.13, SE = .47, p = .024, 95\% CI [0.17, 2.09]$, but not in the humor condition, $b = 1.08, SE = 1.14, p = .35, 95\% CI [-1.26, 3.42]$. The results are consistent with expectations.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of humor on creativity. For this purpose, two hypotheses were examined. In the first hypothesis, it was expected that the participants reading humor images prior to idea generation task would outperform the others. This hypothesis was supported. The participants receiving cartoons were more creative.

In the second hypothesis, it was expected that the extraversion would enhance creativity in the control group, but not the humor group. This hypothesis was also supported. The

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correlation and regression analyses demonstrated that exposure to humor objects reduced the effect of extraversion on creativity.

One of the contributions of the current study to the literature is that it is one of few studies that examine the causal link between humor and creativity. Moreover, the effect of humor on the relation between personality traits and creativity becomes apparent. However, the existing study is a pilot study and needs to be further developed. Further research should offer insight through large samples, extraversion manipulations, various humor styles, and detailed analyses such as moderation.

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Conflict of Interest

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

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