

Role Of Adaptive And Maladaptive Humor In Quality Of Life Of Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Humor plays an integral role in shaping individuals' psychological well-being and overall quality of life, especially among young adults. The present study aimed to explore the relationship between humor styles and dimensions of quality of life in a sample of young adults. Humor styles, as defined by Martin et al. (2003), are classified into affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating humor. A total of 200 young adults (aged 18-25 years) from Jaipur, Rajasthan, were selected through a convenience sampling method. A correlational research design was used. Participants completed the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) and the Quality-of-Life Scale (QoLS). The results showed a significant positive correlation between adaptive and self-enhancing humor styles and the physical, psychological, and social dimensions of quality of life. Conversely, maladaptive humor styles, namely aggressive and self-defeating humor, were significantly negatively correlated with the physical, psychological, and social dimensions of quality of life. This study underscores the significance of adaptive humor in fostering a better quality of life, suggesting that humor can be an effective tool for promoting emotional resilience and mental health in young adults.

1. INTRODUCTION

Humor, which is woven into the fabric of our everyday interactions, cultural expressions, and psychological processes, is a universal aspect of human experience. At its core, it is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon that has intrigued scholars, philosophers, and laypeople alike for centuries. At its heart, it is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon that has fascinated thinkers of all ages for hundreds of years. While its outward manifestations may vary from slapstick comedy to subtle irony, Humor shares common underlying mechanisms that make it universally recognized and deeply meaningful. An exact definition of humor remains elusive due to the subjective nature of individuals' perceptions of on this concept. Explaining humor to a sentient race would present a formidable challenge, given its complexity and lack of universal definition. Presently, there exist more than 80 theories dedicated to elucidating humor and its significance in human existence (Martin & Lefcourt, 1984). Martin and Ford (2018) have mentioned the three primary theories of humor. First, relief theory focuses on the motivating mechanics of interpersonal needs, arguing that humour reduces stress. The authors compare this to a hydraulic engine, with laughing functioning as a steam pipe pressure valve. Laughter helps to alleviate pent-up tensions. Incongruity theory, which focuses on the cognitive processes of perception and interpretation, proposes that humour is explained by perceptions of incongruity (Martin & Ford, 2018). In other words, laughing comes from anticipating an alternative outcome than what was anticipated. Superiority theory states that humor allows one to feel superior to others (Berger, 1987). Finally, the benign violation hypothesis states that humour arises when norms or predicted behaviours are violated without significant repercussions. Seligman's work focuses on identifying and cultivating strengths and virtues that contribute to a fulfilling life. While humor is not explicitly listed as one of the character strengths in Seligman's VIA Classification of Strengths, it is implicitly recognized as a positive trait that contributes to well-being

when expressed in a healthy and adaptive manner. Seligman's work focuses on identifying and cultivating strengths and virtues that contribute to a fulfilling life. While humor is not explicitly listed as one of the character strengths in Seligman's VIA Classification of Strengths, it is implicitly recognized as a positive trait that contributes to well-being when expressed in a healthy and adaptive manner. Positive emotions such as joy, gratitude, and amusement play a major role in promoting resilience and psychological flourishing (Kuiper & McHale, 2009). Humor, with its ability to elicit laughter, amusement, and positive affect, is considered a valuable source of positive emotion within this framework (Martin, 2019).

A multidimensional approach to humor style was developed by Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, and Weir in their seminal paper titled "Individual Differences in Uses of Humor and Their Relation to Psychological Well-Being: Development of the Humor Styles Questionnaire" (2003). The four-humor style includes - Affiliative Humour which aims to improve interpersonal connections, foster a sense of unity, and reduce stress in social settings. People with high levels of self-enhancing humour utilise humour as a coping strategy to reduce stress, maintain a good attitude, and build resilience. Aggressive style humor involves using humor to criticize or disparage others, assert dominance, or cope with negative emotions through hostile or sarcastic humor. Individuals who use self-defeating humor employ self-deprecating or self-mocking humor to ingratiate themselves with others, seek reassurance, or cope with feelings of inadequacy.

Like humour, health-related quality of life can be hard to define and is not confined to a single, easy category (Ferrans, 1996). Multiple perspectives about the right metrics for measuring quality of life have been expressed throughout the concept's development over time. Throughout the evolution of the quality-of-life concept, various viewpoints have emerged regarding its assessment. Economically, quality of life has been linked to one's standard of living (Asthana, 2009), suggesting that an increase in standard of living enhances quality of life. This perspective emphasizes the role of income and wealth in generating satisfaction and happiness (Asthana), albeit with diminishing returns beyond a certain threshold (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002). In the 1980s, researchers in the field of quality of life began to broaden their focus beyond just standard of living (WHO, 1991), exploring the impact of health indicators such as disease on daily activities and behavior (WHO). However, these measures fell short of capturing the full spectrum of quality of life as they primarily assessed how negative health factors diminish it (Fallowfield, 1990). In response, the World Health Organization Quality of Life (WHOQoL; 1998) work group introduced a more comprehensive scale aimed at evaluating quality of life from a holistic perspective. This approach, termed health-related quality of life (WHOQoL, 1998), integrates considerations of health and healthcare into quality-of-life measurement. World Health organization defines quality of life "individuals' perceptions of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live in and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns." Factors like level of independence, physical health, social relations, and prominent features in the environment affect quality of life of an individual (Skevington et al., 2004). Al Ansari (2006) asserts that the quality of life (QoL) concept is closely intertwined with two fundamental concepts: welfare and well-being, along with other notions such as development, progress, improvement, satisfaction, and needs. This encompasses feelings of satisfaction, security, and fulfillment when addressing one's needs and motivations.

So far, there have been very limited studies that specifically investigate the relationship between humor styles and quality of life. However, previous research suggests a correlation between adaptive humor styles and mental health indicators. Considering that mental health contributes to overall quality of life, it is reasonable to assume that an individual's humor style might influence their quality of life. Young adulthood, characterized by transitions in education, employment, and relationships, is a pivotal stage in human development. It is during this period that individuals undergo significant changes in identity, autonomy, and social roles, making it crucial to understand factors that contribute to their overall well-being. It serves as a coping mechanism, a social lubricant, and a source of pleasure, playing a vital role in interpersonal interactions, emotional regulation, and stress management. Humor, with its ability to elicit laughter, alleviate stress, and forge social connections, holds immense potential to enhance various dimensions of young adults' lives." Given the significance of both humor and quality of life in psychological research, there is growing interest in exploring the relationship between these two constructs, particularly in the context of young adulthood. Martin et al. (2003) conducted a longitudinal study that revealed a significant negative correlation between individuals' frequency of engaging in humorous behaviors and their levels of anxiety and depression over time. Similarly, Ruch and Hofmann (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of existing literature, confirming the robust association between humor and reduced psychological distress across various populations. In recent times a Meta-Analysis" conducted by Feng Jiang, Su Lu, Tonglin Jiang, and Heqi Jia (2020) explores the intersection between humor styles and subjective well-being across different cultural and age groups. These findings underscore the pivotal role of humor as a coping mechanism in the face of adversity. By offering individuals a light-hearted perspective, humor enables them to reframe stressors and maintain positive emotional states. Moreover, humor serves as a buffer against the negative effects of stress, helping individuals navigate challenging situations with resilience and adaptability. The studies highlighted the therapeutic potential of humor in promoting mental well-being and resilience in the face of life's adversities. Furthermore, their study revealed intriguing age-related differences in the relationship between humor styles and subjective well-being. While affiliative and self-enhancing humor remained consistently associated with higher levels of subjective well-being across all age groups, the magnitude of this association was found to diminish with age. This suggests that the salience of different humor styles in promoting subjective well-being may evolve over the lifespan, with younger individuals deriving greater benefits from humor compared to older adults. Humor as a character strength, predicted resilience above and beyond other psychological factors, underscoring the protective role of humor in enhancing individuals' ability to cope with life's challenges (Martínez-Martí and Ruch, 2017).

Humor has been found to play a crucial role in fostering positive social relationships. Studies by Cann et al. (2002) & Martin & Ford (2018) have demonstrated that shared laughter promotes social cohesion, strengthens interpersonal bonds, and enhances feelings of connectedness among individuals. Moreover, humor facilitates communication and conflict resolution within relationships, thereby contributing to overall relationship satisfaction and quality. The research conducted by Kuiper and Martin (1998) and Abel (2002) provides compelling evidence supporting the notion that humor plays a significant role in enhancing individuals' overall life satisfaction and happiness levels. Through their investigations, these studies have demonstrated that humor acts as a potent catalyst for positive emotional experiences, fostering feelings of joy, amusement, and optimism among individuals. By infusing everyday life with moments of levity and laughter, humor elevates individuals' subjective experiences of well-being, contributing to a sense of fulfillment and contentment in life. In times of stress or difficulty, the ability to find humor in the situation can provide a valuable source of relief and perspective, helping individuals maintain a positive outlook and emotional equilibrium. Individuals who exhibited a higher propensity for humor were better equipped to cope with academic pressures and setbacks. Humor served as a coping mechanism, enabling these individuals to reframe challenges in a more positive light, maintain a sense of perspective, and persevere through difficult academic circumstances (Cann et al. 2008; Martin and Lefcourt, 2004).

The role of humor styles in predicting quality of life has not been studied much. Adaptive humor styles have shown a positive association with markers of psychological well-being, such as self-esteem (Stieger, Formann, & Burger, 2011). Conversely, maladaptive humor has demonstrated a positive correlation with indicators of psychological distress, such as depression (Hugelshofer, Kwon, Reff, & Olson, 2006). Proyer and Ruch (2011) distinguished between authentic and self-enhancing humor styles, demonstrating their unique contributions to well-being in everyday life. While authentic humor, characterized by genuine expression and connection with others, fostered deeper levels of satisfaction and meaning, self-enhancing humor, involving a light-hearted approach to life's difficulties, promoted positive affect and psychological resilience. One study conducted by Kasow (2012) sheds light in the same direction. Humour types that strongly predict quality of life and its dimensions are self-oriented, including both self-enhancing and self-defeating behaviours. affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles positively contribute to subjective well-being of a person, while aggressive and self-defeating humor styles have a pejorative impact on well-being (Schneider et al., 2018). Previous studies have indicated that adaptive humor styles correlate positively with indicators of psychological health, while maladaptive humor styles are linked to psychological distress. Despite these findings, direct research on humor's impact on quality of life is lacking specially for young adults. Therefore, the objective of the present study is to investigate the relationship between humor styles and quality of life in young adults.

1.1 Hypothesis

There would be a significant correlation between humor styles (affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating) and physical, psychological, social, environmental dimensions of quality of life in young adults.

1.2 Method

Sample - A sample of 200 young adults between the age group of 18-25 was drawn from Jaipur city (Rajasthan, India) by means of non-probability convenience sampling. Participants proficient in English and not undergoing treatment for any chronic or acute physical or mental condition were chosen.

1.3 Measures

Demographic Information Questionnaire: Participants' names, ages, genders, educational backgrounds, occupations, and cities were all gathered using a questionnaire to acquire demographic data.

Humor Style Questionnaire: The scale was developed by Martin et. al (2003) comprises 32 items divided into four subscales, with two subscales classified as adaptive and two as maladaptive. The adaptive subscales assess Affiliative humor and Self-enhancing humor, while the maladaptive subscales assess Aggressive humor and Self-defeating humor. Participants rate their agreement with each item on a seven-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates "Totally Disagree" and 7 indicates "Totally Agree". The scale shows sound psychometric properties for this scale, including strong internal consistency coefficients for all four subscales (α ranging from .77 to .81).

Quality of Life Scale (QoLS): The World Health Organization Quality of Life-Brief version (WHOQOL-BREF; (WHOQoL Group, 1998) is a 26-item questionnaire that was developed to use as a shorter version of the World Health Organization Quality of Life 100 item scale. The test measures subjective quality of life in four domains: Physical, Psychological, Social and Environmental. Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale where lower scores indicating lower quality of life and high scores indicating a high quality of life. The Cronbach's alpha internal reliability coefficient was .70, .79, .62, and .71 for the physical, psychological, social, and environmental domains respectively. It shows good discriminant validity, content validity, internal consistency, and test-retest reliability.

1.4 Procedure

After selection of appropriate measures, a sample of 200 young adults was selected using non-probability sampling. A consent form was duly filled by the respondents before providing them the questionnaires. The participants were requested to fill the questionnaires carefully and to respond to all the items in the test. A correlational research design was used for the present study. The scoring was done as per the instructions and data was subjected to correlation analysis using SPSS.

2. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Table 1: Descriptive statistics: Mean and Standard Deviation of the variables studied (N = 200)

Variables	Mean	SD
Affiliative Humor	33.96	5.79
Self-enhancing humor	37.08	6.54
Aggressive humor	26.32	6.45
Self-defeating humor	31.55	9.32
Humor	128.92	17.18
Quality of life	23.67	3.38
Physical	23.44	3.31
Psychological	20.82	3.38
Social	10.08	1.72
Environmental	27.62	4.56
Total	81.96	9.30

Table 2: Correlation Coefficient between Humor Style and Quality of Life of young adults (N = 200)

	Quality of Life			
Humor	Physical	Psychological	Social	Environmental
Affiliating humor	0.17*	0.28**	0.32**	0.11
Self-enhancing humor	0.16*	0.26**	0.24**	0.12
Aggressive humor	-0.16*	-0.30**	-0.27**	-0.15*
Self-defeating humor	-0.17*	-0.20**	-0.11	-0.12

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

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

The present study investigated the relationship between different humor styles and various dimensions of quality of life (physical, psychological, social, and environmental) in young adults. The findings suggest that humor styles significantly correlate with individuals' quality of life, with distinct patterns emerging for each humor style.

Affiliating humor, which primarily fosters interpersonal connections and reduces social stress, emerged as a significant positive predictor of all dimensions of quality of life. The correlations between affiliating humor and physical ($r = 0.17$, <0.05), psychological ($r = 0.28$, <0.01), and social ($r = 0.32$, <0.01) dimensions of quality of life. No significant correlation was obtained between affiliating humor and environmental dimensions of quality of life. These results align with findings by Martin et al. (2003), who highlighted that affiliative humor promotes emotional and social bonding, enhancing well-being. The positive correlations in this study suggest that affiliating humor may act as a protective factor against psychological distress, fostering social cohesion and improving overall life satisfaction (Cann et al., 2002). Moreover, affiliating humor boosts resilience and foster positive emotional states (Kuiper & McHale, 2009).

Self-enhancing humor, characterized as a coping mechanism to maintain a positive attitude, was also found to be positively correlated with quality of life. The physical ($r = 0.16^*$, <0.05), psychological ($r = 0.26$, <0.05), and social ($r = 0.24$, <0.01) dimensions of quality of life showed significant positive correlations with self-enhancing humor. No significant correlation was obtained between affiliating humor and environmental dimensions of quality of life., who emphasized the role of Self-enhancing humor plays a crucial role in promoting resilience, coping with stress, and maintaining psychological well-being (Martin & Lefcourt, 2004; Jiang et al., 2020) The ability to reframe challenges through humor helps individuals cope with life's adversities, contributing to better mental health and a higher quality of life.

In contrast, aggressive humor, involving sarcasm and hostility, exhibited a significant negative relationship with physical ($r = -0.16$, <0.05), psychological ($r = -0.30$, <0.01), and social ($r = -0.27$, <0.01) & environmental ($r = -0.15$, <0.01) dimensions of quality of life. Schneider et al. (2018), Aggressive humor tends to exacerbate psychological distress and impair social relationships. Individuals who frequently engage in aggressive humor may experience more interpersonal conflicts and heightened negative emotional states. They also experience a diminished sense of satisfaction with their surroundings and environment. (Proyer & Ruch, 2011).

Self-defeating humor, characterized by self-deprecation and seeking reassurance from others, also showed a negative correlation with various aspects of quality of life. The correlations were particularly significant in physical ($r = -0.17^*$, <0.05) and psychological ($r = -0.20$, <0.01) dimensions of quality of life. However, there were no significant correlations between self-defeating humor and the social or environmental dimensions of quality of life. Although self-defeating humor may

provide short-term relief in social situations, it can negatively impact self-esteem and psychological well-being in the long run (Martin & Lefcourt, 2004).

30. CONCLUSION

The present study provides empirical evidence that humor styles significantly influence various dimensions of quality of life in young adults. Adaptive humor styles, such as affiliative and self-enhancing humor, are positively correlated with better physical, psychological, and social well-being, while maladaptive humor styles, like aggressive and self-defeating humor, show negative correlations with quality of life. However, the study is limited by the lack of extensive literature specifically exploring the relationship between humor styles and quality of life, particularly among young adults. While this study provides valuable insights, future research should aim to fill this gap, expanding the focus to various demographic factors, including gender differences, which were not considered in the current study. The findings of the study would be helpful in developing interventions for enhancing psychological resilience, well-being, and social connectivity, while addressing maladaptive humor styles may be crucial for mitigating psychological distress.

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