

Evaluation of humor styles questionnaire research paper

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of humour has been studied by many individuals in the past; Martin et al. (2003) define humour as having four distinct dimensions: affiliative humour (engaging in humorous banter and jokes in order to create relationships with others), self-enhancing humour (maintaining a sense of humour about life regardless of negative events), aggressive humour (snark and sarcasm in order to ridicule others for one's own narcissism), and self-defeating humour (self-disparagement in order to soften the blow of real potential ridicule). These theories are thought to provide a more comprehensive summary of the four most commonly found subtypes of humour, that have little to no positive correlation between the two so as to ensure uniqueness.

The Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) was developed by Martin et al. (2003) through a construct-based scale construction approach. Items were generated that had high content saturation, in order to provide a sample of all four humour dimensions that were hypothesized by the researchers. Then, this item pool was examined by performing a study wherein undergraduate students responded to the humour items according to these dimensions. After this initial study was completed, more humour items were collected and changed, performing a second sample with this revised criteria.

The HSQ is structured into the aforementioned four dimensions - affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating, with a series of statements

underlying each section. One of seven factors indicating the strength of their agreement with the statement is selected, providing an indicator of their style of humour. The scale was refined based on the nearly 500 participants in their study as a whole, and it was tested for validity. Many of the samples between the four different factors were at least .97, and so factorial similarity between these samples was present. Comparing the peer rating items to their answers on the HSQ scales, it was clear there was a significant correlation between the indicator humour preferences and their actual selections. The affiliative humor correlation was more than 95% accurate, and the self-enhancing humor scale was 99.9% accurate (Martin et al., 2003).

Since its development as a scale for assessing humor styles, it has been used in a number of studies. Veselka et al. (2010) performed a study in order to attempt a link between mental toughness and particular humour styles. Phenotypic correlations were attempted between the aforementioned four humour dimensions and mental toughness dimensions. The HSQ was used in this instance to measure humour dimensions in their sample of 201 pairs of adult twins, the MT48 being used to measure mental toughness. The key findings in this study included the presence of negative consequences to the presence of certain types of humour (self-defeating in particular), indicating a negative correlation between humor as a concept and mental resilience to life forces. The researchers posited, via the results, that both positive and negative humour styles are present, and they have positive or negative effects on human resiliency (Veselka et al., 2010). While the results are

intriguing, and are most certainly indicative of the findings they were searching for, the absence of a separate validity or reliability test performed puts their results into question. Therefore, these results are tentative until they establish reliability and validity. This study emphasizes the need for psychometric evaluation of the HSQ, due to the tentative nature of the results; it is difficult to discern exactly how effective the HSQ was at determining the true humour styles of the participants.

Taher et al. (2008) performed a study in which the HSQ was used to determine which styles of humour are more prevalent in Lebanese culture. The HSQ, along with other measures, were used to determine humour and levels of depression in a sample of 435 individuals in Lebanon, all of whom were of Lebanese origin. In their findings, negative humour styles were positively correlated with scores of anxiety and avoidance, providing further evidence that these negative humor styles are indicative of anxiety and depression issues in individuals who use these more often than other humour styles. The results are discussed in the context of comparing Lebanese and North American cultures, wherein self-defeating humor may have fewer negative consequences in Lebanon than America. Ultimately, they determine that the HSQ by itself is not an accurate barometer of social functioning and mental health in a Lebanese context (Tahar, 2008).

Cecen (2007) used the HSQ along with the UCLA-R Loneliness scale in a sample of 483 undergraduate students in Turkey in order to make correlations between humour styles and levels of loneliness in individuals. It was determined that three of the humour styles (all but aggressive) were

significantly correlated to loneliness in a Turkish context. The MANOVA technique was used to provide correlations and stepwise regression analysis, showing all results to be statistically significant and reliable. This study goes a long way toward proving the psychometric properties of the HSQ.

Another study of twins using the HSQ was performed by Vernon et al. (2008), in the context of weighing humour styles and the Big-5 personality traits to determine the correlations in behavioral genetics. The overall goal of this study was to determine whether or not differences in humour styles were due to the individual's environment or genetics. According to their results, it was found that many of the Big-5 traits has very significant phenotypic correlations between humour styles, indicating the significant role of genetic factors in the determination of said humour dimensions. The confidence interval of these results perpetually remained above 95%, leaving the results to be statistically significant, and therefore reliable (Vernon et al., 2008). The psychometric properties of the HSQ are clear in this context, due to the similarity and clear correlations between aspects of personalities and humour styles, which deal with similar subjects.

In all of these key studies, the HSQ provides a varied level of psychometric validity or significance. The psychometric properties of the HSQ, as a result, still require further study. The purpose of the current study is to provide further data to support or refute the claim that the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) is reliable and valid. It is hypothesized that the results found in Martin et al. (2003) will be supported/rejected.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 360 adults: 180 undergraduate psychology students from the University of Western Sydney and 180 opposite-sex friends or relatives. They lived in Australia and were drawn from a multicultural population. The students participated as part of a course requirement and received early access to data in return to their participation.

Materials

Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ). The HSQ (Martin et al., 2003) was used to measure individual differences in the four humor styles (affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, self-defeating). The questionnaire comprises 32 items, each presenting a self-reflective statement regarding humor.

Participants used a 7-point Likert Scale (where 1 = Totally disagree and 7 = Totally agree) to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each item.

Cronbach alpha values for the humor style scales range from .77 (aggressive humor) to .81 (self-enhancing humor; Martin et al., 2003).

Procedure

Participants were requested to complete an on-line questionnaire accessible through the University website. The UWS students participated as part of a course requirement and received early access to data in return to their participation.

References

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