



Happiness among Undergraduates: What is the Role of Humour Styles?

Chidozie Emmanuel Mabia^{1*}, Chidozie Edwin Nwafor¹,
Kizto Ifunanya Okonkwo², Emeka A. Nwankwo¹,
Paschal Kandilichukwu Officha¹, Kingsley Onyibo Nweke¹,
Samuel Uche Ezeakabekwe², Tobias Chineze Enike¹, Chidiebere Udensi¹
and Ikemefuna Henry Eweni¹

¹Department of Psychology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.

²Department of Psychology, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam, Anambra State, Nigeria.

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/ARJASS/2021/v15i230256

Editor(s):

- (1) Dr. Shiro Horiuchi, Hannan University, Japan.
(2) Dr. David Perez Jorge, University of La Laguna, Spain.

Reviewers:

- (1) Siniša Franjić, Croatia.
(2) Veena N, Bangalore University, India.
(3) Fatima Shanawaz, Amity University Haryana, India.
(4) Gulzhaina K. Kassymova, Satbayev University, Kazakhstan.

Complete Peer review History: <https://www.sdiarticle4.com/review-history/73210>

Original Research Article

Received 18 July 2021
Accepted 23 September 2021
Published 08 October 2021

ABSTRACT

Hedonism theory and desire theory assumed that internal factors (humour styles) may explain happiness among undergraduates. In the current study, the assumption is tested among 226 undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Ages of the participants were 18-40 years (M= 21.66 years, SD= 3.10). Two scales were used to collect data for the study: Subjective happiness scale (SHS) and humour styles questionnaire (HSQ). The study adopted correlation design and the hypothesis was tested with multiple regression analysis. The results indicated that humour styles; affiliative humour, self-enhancing humour and self-defeating humour significantly predicted happiness while aggressive humour did not. The outcome of the study suggested for the first time a framework for understanding the role of humour styles on happiness. It was suggested

that affiliative, self-enhancing and self-defeating humour styles should be encouraged and included in the University's programs as part of general studies, routine seminars, conferences and orientations of new students.

Keywords: Happiness; humour styles: affiliative; self-enhancing; aggressive and self-defeating.

1. INTRODUCTION

Happiness has been conceptualized from a bio-psycho-social perspective [1,2], and happiness contributes to the overall mental health of an individual [3,4]. By implication, the overall psycho-social wellbeing of an individual to some extent have some connection with happiness [5] such that the more an individual is described as happy the more such individual will experience optimal psycho-social well being which is in turn pointer of optimal mental health [2].

Happiness is subjective well-being, ranges from, a person's verdict of life satisfaction, and the balance of positive and negative affect experienced in everyday life (Bates, & Luciano, 2008) [6,7,8,9]. Happiness is a mental or emotional state of comfort defined by positive or pleasant emotions ranging from one's life satisfaction, the experience of joy to passionate contentment [4].

Positive psychologists believed that across the life span, especially for late adolescent and early adults who are still in higher institutions of learning, happiness, to some extent, contributes some desirable outcomes such as good grades, graduation from school, better peer relationship and interaction, less problem with authorities, report of good hygiene and health, and less involvement in violent acts [10-16].

In reality, every individual claims that the earnest desire of involving in daily activities is to achieve success and happiness [17], Scholars have explored many factors that are related to happiness (positively and negatively), among which are external factors such as family, friends, grades, material possessions and money [18-22]. Yet other researchers have explored some internal factors including personality traits [23,19,8].

One important personality attribute that is explored among undergraduates as it relates to happiness is humour style. A Humour style is conceptualized as a person's consistent way of humour in daily life, that is, one's distinctive and stable model of humour behaviours and attitudes [24]. Humour style has been found by

researchers [24] to have many dimensions such as (affiliative, self-enhancing, self-defeating, and aggressive). These various dimensions are not all positive, therefore, they may lead to the manifestation of undesirable behavioural outcomes. What makes humour styles an important phenomenon to examine is the fact that it is a multifaceted predispose tendency which may have a powerful differential influence on individual's overall wellbeing including happiness.

This assertion is further explained in hedonism theory which states that happiness is a matter of raw subjective feelings, that a happy life is a life that maximizes feelings of pleasure and minimizes feelings of pain [25]. Then following these assertions and the nature of humour styles, this study tends to explore how different domains of humour styles relate to happiness. The knowledge is expected to help in the understanding of how happiness can be achieved or hindered by internal tendencies and possibly stir up studies that will help in understanding happiness.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two of the three traditional theories of happiness: hedonism and desire theories [25] formed the theoretical framework that guided this study hypothesis. The theories are in the relationship among humour styles (affiliative, self-enhancing, self-defeating, and aggressive) and happiness. Hedonism theory states that happiness is a matter of raw subjective feelings, that a happy life is a life that maximizes feelings of pleasure and minimizes feelings of pain. This shows that a happy person or people smile always showing that they have high and many pleasures while their pains are less. So, maximization of feelings of pleasure and minimization of feelings of pain increases happiness while the reverse decreases happiness in people. It is assumed that maximization of affiliative and self-enhancing and minimization of self-defeating and aggressive humour styles are likely to increase happiness. Desire theory holds that happiness is a matter of getting what one wants [17]. Desire theory holds that fulfilling one's desire contributes to happiness regardless of the amount of pleasure

that faces one. It assumed that desire theory did not agree with hedonism theory. It is assumed that if what one's desires are high, they are likely to increase affiliative and self-enhancing humour traits and reduce self-defeating and aggressive humour traits which will likely increase happiness in an individual.

Empirically, Michalos' [26] correlational studies supported the above theories by revealing that a strong relationship exist between overall happiness and contentment. Michalos [26] stated that the smaller the gap between standard and reality, the higher the level of happiness. The finding is in line with hedonism and desire, theories. This means that the higher the feelings of pleasure and the lower the feelings of pain, the happiness level is likely to increase. Moreover, Kasser and Ryan, [27] study of correlation between happiness and perceived achievement of specific goals like completing a study or raising a family revealed that success in some goals counts more than success in other goals. They stated that happiness is weakly related to material goals. This suggests that intrinsic goals achievement motivates happiness. This means that hedonism and desire theories are about intrinsic goals that motivate happiness as against extrinsic goals that reduce happiness.

Moreover, Yue, Liu, and Hirandani (2014) study of 227 undergraduates revealed that adaptive humour styles (affiliative humour and self-enhancing humour) significantly predicted subjective happiness, and mediated the relationship between self-esteem and subjective happiness. Finding by Yue et al. (2014) revealed also that maladaptive humour styles (aggressive humour and self-defeating humour) did not significantly predict happiness. Furthermore, Kemaloglu, Guclu, and Durhan [28] study on happiness and humour revealed that a significant positive relationship existed between affiliative humour, self-enhancing humour, and happiness while a negative relationship occurred between aggressive humour and happiness. Ryff [29] as cited in Martin et al. [24] found that psychological well-being related positively to affiliative humour and self-enhancing humour styles and related negatively to self-defeating humour style. The findings of Hampes [30] supported also that self-enhancing humor is associated with the ability to make the perspectives of another person by understanding better the persons' thoughts and feelings. The findings of Davis and Gold [31] equally supported humour styles and happiness by stating that the offender's remorse reduced victims' attribution of behavioural stability by

making the victim believe that the offender would less likely commit an offense in the future. This belief may bring happiness between the victims and offenders.

Therefore, this work tested the following hypotheses:

- i. Affiliative, humour will significantly predict happiness among undergraduates.
- ii. Self-defeating humour will significantly predict happiness among undergraduates.
- iii. Aggressive humour will significantly predict happiness among undergraduates

3. METHODS

3.1 Participants

Two hundred and twenty-six (226) participants were selected using a mixed sampling technique (purposive and incidental) from Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. The selected participants comprised 118 females and 108 males The ages of the participants ranged from eighteen (18) to forty (40) years, and the average age was 21.66 years (SD = 3.10).

3.2 Instruments

Two instruments were used for the study; Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) developed by Lyubomirsky and Lepper [7] and Humour Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) developed by [24].

3.3 Subjective Happiness Scale

Lyubomirsky and Lepper [7] developed and validated SHS to measure levels of happiness. SHS is a four items scale scored on seven Likert formats. The first item in SHS was scored (1 - not a very happy person to 7 - a very happy person), the second item was scored (1 - less happy to 7 - more happy) while the last two items were scored (1 - not at all to 7 - a great deal), and item 4 is reverse scored. Quezada, Landero and Gonzalez [32] reported cronbach alpha reliability of .77. In this study, SHS was equally tested for internal consistency and Cronbach Alpha reliability of .79 was obtained:

3.4 Humour Styles Questionnaire

Martin, et al. [24] developed and validated Humour styles instrument to measure four subscales of humour styles: affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating humours. HSQ is a thirty-two item scale scored on five Likert format (1 - strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree), Item 1,7,9,15,16,17,22,23,

25,29,31 were reverse scored. Mabia, Nwankwo, Ndukaihe, Okonkwo, and Officha [33] reported internal consistency of HSQ as follows; affiliative .76, self-enhancing .78, aggressive .72, self-defeating .75. So, SHS and HSQ were reliable and valid for use in this study.

3.5 Procedure

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Then after informed consent and assent were obtained from the school authorities: The researchers randomly selected five out of ten Faculties and one Department from each of the selected Faculties were used for the study. Afterward, fifty (50) participants were incidentally selected from each of the five Departments but only two hundred and twenty – six (226) participants completed their measuring instruments (questionnaires) accurately and were used for final analysis. The two instruments; the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) and Humour Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) were administered to the consented participants at their lecture halls and were collected immediately after about 40 minutes.

3.6 Design and Statistical

Survey research was used in the study. The design of the study was a correlational design which allowed the use of multiple linear regression statistics for data analysis.

4. RESULTS

The findings in the Table 1 above revealed that affiliative humour significantly predict happiness ($\beta = .252$, $t = 3.267$, $P = .001$), self-enhancing humour significantly predict happiness ($\beta = .164$, $t = 2.109$, $P = .037$), aggressive humour did not significantly predict happiness ($\beta = .040$, $t = .521$, $P = .603$) and self-defeating humour significantly and negatively predicted happiness among undergraduates, ($\beta = -.177$, $t = -2.321$, $P = .022$).

4. DISCUSSION

Fundamentally, the main objective of this research was to investigate whether humour

styles; affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating humours will significantly predict happiness among undergraduates. The findings revealed that humour styles (affiliative, self-enhancing, and self-defeating humours) significantly predicted happiness while aggressive humour style did not predict happiness among undergraduates.

Affiliative humour significantly predicted happiness among undergraduates. This shows that when affiliative humour is increasing happiness will be increasing and vice versa. This finding supported the findings of [28], (Yue et al., 2014) which revealed that affiliative humour positively and significantly predicted happiness. The finding is also related to the findings of [34,35] which found that laughter can remove some of the negative effects of stress. Hedonism theory [25] and desire theory [17] also offered some explanations as to why pleasure maximization, pains minimization, and getting what one wants are naturally expected to influence the happiness of people in the society. This means that amusing someone will make the person forget some of life's stressful situations that might be hindering the person's happiness. This may be the reason people sometimes attend some shows to watch comedians live on stage, to laugh out some stressful situations which will make them a bit happy by forgetting such stressful situations in one's life. Furthermore, the study shows that there is a significant and positive correlation between affiliative humour and happiness. This shows that affiliative humour is a good predictor of happiness, which has to be practiced always to maintain happiness among people.

The finding revealed also that self-enhancing humour significantly predicted happiness among undergraduates. This finding is also in a relationship with the finding of [28], (Yue et al., 2014) which showed that self-enhancing humour is significantly and positively related to happiness. This finding shows that self-enhancing humour may contribute much to

Table 1. Summary table of multiple learner regression of happiness model and humour styles

Variables	R ²	F	STD	β	T	P
	.146	.131	2.38			
Affliative				.252**	3.267	.001<.05
Self-enhancing				.164*	2.109	.037<.05
Aggressive				.040	.521	.603>.05
Self-defeating				.177*	-2.321	.022<.05

* $P < .05$ ** $P < .01$

reducing stressful situations that might have caused some ill health in individuals, which is likely to contribute in increasing the level of individuals' happiness. This finding is partially related to the finding of Celso et al. [34] and Du Pre [35] which showed that laughter can remove some of the negative effects of stress. Likewise, the finding of Adams and McGuire [36] stated that watching humorous videos has also been associated with a significant decrease in the request for pain-relieving medication. Hedonism theory [25] offered some explanations why maximization of pleasures and minimization of pains contributes to people's happiness. This is because; individuals sometimes watch humorous videos to achieve happiness through maximization of pleasures and minimization of pains which contributes to making people happy sometimes. Therefore, self-enhancing humour significantly correlated with happiness. This shows equally that self-enhancing humour is a good predictor of happiness among undergraduates.

Moreover, the result of this study shows also that aggressive humour did not predict happiness among undergraduates. The findings supported findings by [28], (Yue et al., 2014) which revealed that aggressive humour did not positively and significantly relate with happiness. The finding is also supported by hedonism theory [25] which states that a happy life is a life that maximizes feelings of pleasure and minimizes feelings of pain. This shows that using aggressive humour on people sometimes maximizes the person's feelings of pain and minimizes feelings of pleasure which contributes to making people happy. This shows equally that most of the time, aggressive humour militates against happiness of people, and undergraduates are not left out. The finding reveals that aggressive humour is not significantly correlated with happiness and that aggressive humour is not a good predictor of happiness.

The findings revealed also that self-defeating humour significantly predicted happiness among undergraduates in a negative direction. This result supported the findings of [28,29,24], (Yue et al., 2014) which stated that self-defeating humour is negatively related to happiness. The finding is equally supported by hedonism theory [25] which holds that a happy life maximizes feelings of pleasure and minimizes pain. This shows that detrimental (self-defeating) humour is likely to minimize feelings of pleasure and

maximizes pain. This is because the result shows that as detrimental humour is increasing, happiness will be decreasing, likewise when happiness is increasing, self-defeating humour will be decreasing. Therefore, based on hedonism theory, as self-defeating humour is increasing, feelings of pleasure will be minimized while feelings of pain will be maximized and vice versa. Moreover, the research revealed equally that self-defeating humour is significantly correlated with happiness. This confirms that self-defeating humour relates to happiness. Therefore, self-defeating humour is equally a good predictor of happiness in an inverse direction.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The implications of this study revealed that affiliative humour style beta weight is highest in this study. This equally shows that the affiliative humour style contributes more to happiness than other styles of humour. The result revealed equally that self-enhancing and self-defeating humour styles should be encouraged to improve happiness among people. Since few studies were carried out in humour styles and happiness in our environment to the best of researchers' knowledge, this study will add new information to the existing volume of empirical work on happiness. The findings of the present study will provide some important information for students on some of the likely factors that will improve happiness, such as encouraging them to know when to joke and not to joke so that no one should be offended, to maintain continuous happiness. Again the findings highlighted that humour styles (affiliative, self-enhancing, and self-defeating) should be encouraged and included in the University's programmes as part of general studies, routine seminars, conferences, and orientations of new students. This will help in developing social interventions for peace building and intergroup harmony among undergraduates and ethnic groups in Nigeria.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

One of the limitations of the study is that as survey research, participants may not have responded according to how they felt when administered the questionnaire. Moreover, data collected were only on few undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (NAU) who were willing to participate in the research, who were not the total representative of the general

population of NAU, undergraduates Awka campus. Equally, lack of finance and time-restricted the researcher only to undergraduates NAU, Awka campus.

7. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The study will be seen as a stepping stone to further research, and should not be restricted to Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka (NAU), alone. Efforts to examine humour styles on other people such as Nurses, married couples, military, and Para-military personnel may be of important value to our understanding of humour styles as predictors of happiness. Humour styles and empathy should equally be studied in the future.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher recommended that affiliative, self-enhancing, and self-defeating humour styles should be included in university's programmes as part of general studies, routine seminars, conferences, and orientations of new students.

The researcher recommended also that affiliative, self-enhancing, and self-defeating humours should be encouraged both in higher institutions of learning and among ethnic groups for peaceful co-existence of different ethnic groups in Nigeria.

9. CONCLUSION

The present study explored whether humour styles (affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating) will significantly predict happiness among undergraduates. Evidence from the findings showed that humour styles (affiliative, self-enhancing, and self-defeating) significantly predicted happiness while aggressive humour did not. This further confirmed the presumptions of hedonism theory and desire theory that maximization of pleasure and minimization of pains; and what one desire were indeed important in determining the level of happiness an individual may experience.

CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, Participants' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

ETHICAL APPROVAL

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

REFERENCES

1. Kovac L. The bibliology of happiness: Chasing pleasure and human destiny. *EMBO Rep.* 2012;13(4):297-302.
2. Quoidbach J, Taquet M, Desseilles M, de Montjoye YA, Gross JJ. Happiness and social behaviour. *Psychology Science.* 2019;1(8):1111-1122.
3. Bodeker G, Pecorelli S, Choy L, Guerra R, Kariippanon K. Well-being and mental wellness. *Epidemiology.* 2020;1(62):1-8.
4. Sundriyal R, Kumar R. Happiness and well-being. *The international Journal of Indian Psychology.* 2014;1(4):2348-5396.
5. Ruggeri K, Garcia-Garzon E, Maguire A, Matz S, Huppert FA. Well-being is more than happiness and life satisfaction: A multidimensional analysis of 21 countries. *Health Quality of Life Outcomes.* 2020; 1(8):192-209.
6. Lyubomirsky S. Why are some people happier than others? The role of cognitive and motivational process in well-being. *The American Psychologists.* 2001;56(3): 239-249.
7. Lyubomirsky S, Lepper H. A measure of subjective happiness: Primary reliability and construct validation. *Social Indicators Research.* 1999;46:137-155.
8. Pishva H, Ghalehban M, Moradi A, Hoseini L. Personality and happiness. *Procedia Social and Behavioural Sciences.* 2011;30(2011):429-432.
9. Weiss A, Bates TC, Luciano M. Happiness is a personality thing: The genetics of personality and well-being in a representative sample. *Psychological Science.* 2008;19 (3):205-210.
10. Antaramian S, Lee J. The importance of very high life satisfaction for students academic success. *Cogent Education.* 2017;4(1):23-34.
11. Cheng H, Furnham A. Personality, peer relations, and self-confidence as predictors of happiness and loneliness. *Journal of Adolescence.* 2002;25(3):327-339.
12. Holder M, Coleman B. The contribution of social relationship to children's happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies.* 2007;10(3): 329-349.

13. Kilicarslan S, Liman B. Examining the relationship between happiness and aggression among adolescents. *International online Journal of Education and Sciences*. 2020;12(5):244-262.
14. Lezhnieva N. Peer relationships and quality of life: Association between popularity, reciprocal friendship and self-reported quality of life in 11-12 years. Master thesis at University of Psychology of Oslo; 2017.
15. Lumonto III R. Happiness and other factors behind examination performance of college students. *International Journal of Research studies in Psychology*. 2018;7(2):1-17.
16. Quinn P, Duckworth L. Happiness and academic achievement: Evidence for reciprocal causality. *Happiness PDF.microsoft world-poster text.060807.Doc*; 2007.
17. Griffin J. Well-being: its meaning, measurement and moral importance. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press; 1986.
18. Boyce CJ, Brown GDA, Moore SC. Money and happiness: Rank of income, not income, affects life satisfaction. *Psychological Science*. 2010; 1(3):1-11.
19. Gornik-Durose ME. Materialism and wellbeing revisited: The impact of personality. *Journal of Happiness Studies*. 2020;2(1):305-326.
20. Saidarriaga LM, Bukowski WM, Greco C. Friendship and happiness: A bidirectional dynamic process. *Journal of Social Psychology*. 2015;7(5): 69-81.
21. Verrastro V, Ritella G, Saladino V, Pistella J, Baiocco R, Fontanesi L. Personal and family correlates to happiness amongst Italian children and pre-adolescents. *International Journal of Emotional Education*. 2020;12(1):48-64.
22. Wu Z. Family is the most influential factor on happiness in high school students. *Health*. 2014;6(5):336-341.
23. Chung E, Mathew VN, Subramaniam G. In the pursuit of happiness: The role of personality. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*. 2019;9(11):10-19.
24. Martin RA, Puhlik-Doris P, Larsen G, Gray J, Weir K. Individual differences in uses of humor and their relation to psychological well-being: Development of the humour styles questionnaire. *Journal of Research in Personality*. 2003;37:48-75.
25. Seligman MEP, Royzman ED. Happiness: The three traditional theories. Adopted and edited by Paul Quirk; 2003. Available: [Http://quicksicwkhoon.tripod.com](http://quicksicwkhoon.tripod.com)
26. Michalos AC. Multiple Discrepancies Theory (MDT) Social Indicators Research. 1985;16:347-413.
27. Kasser T, Ryan RM. A dark side of the American dream: correlates of financial success as a central life aspiration. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 1993;6(5):410-422.
28. Kemalolu PY, Guclu M, Durban AT. The happiness, hardness and humour styles of students with bachelors degree in sports science. *Behavioural Sciences*. 2018;1(8):1-10.
29. Ryff CD. Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 1989;57(6):1069-1081.
30. Hampes WP. The relation between humour styles and empathy. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*. 2010;6:34-45.
31. Davis JR, Gold GJ. An examination of emotional empathy, attractions of stability and the link between perceived remorse and forgiveness. *Personality and Individual Differences*. 2011;50:392-397.
32. Quezada H, Landero R, Gonzalez MT. A validity and reliability study of the subjective happiness scale in Mexico. *The Journal of Happiness and Wellbeing*. 2016;4(1):90-100
33. Mabia CE, Nwankwo EA, Ndukaihe IL, Okonkwo KI, Officha PK. Humour styles as predictors of forgiveness among undergraduates. *Zik Journal of Multidisciplinary Rresearch*. 2020;3(1):11-20.
34. Celso BG, Ebener DJ, Burkhead EJ. Humour coping, health status and life satisfaction among older adults in assisted facilities. *Ageing and Mental Health*. 2003;7(6):438-445.
35. Du Pre A. Humour and the healing arts. A multimethod analysis of humour use in

- healthcare. Hillsdale, NJ: Laurence Erlbaum Associates; 1998.
36. Adams E, McGuire F. Is laughter the medicine? A study of the effects of humour on perceived pain and affect. *Activities, Adaptation and Aging*. 1986;8(3-4):157-175.

© 2021 Mabia et al.; This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Peer-review history:
The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
<https://www.sdiarticle4.com/review-history/73210>