



Older Adults Prefer Affiliative Humor and Perceive Their Sense of Humor as Increasing With Age

Jennifer Turner & Jennifer Tehan Stanley
The University of Akron

INTRODUCTION

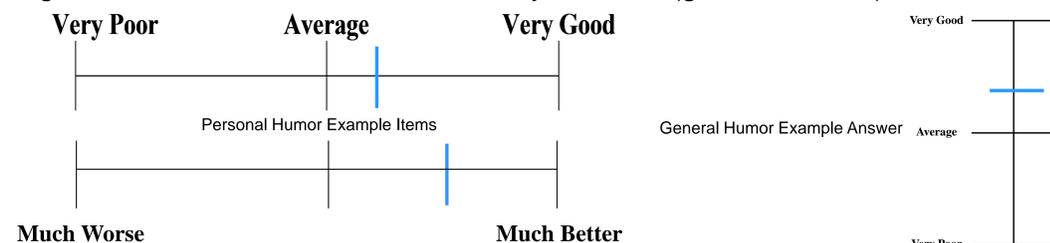
- Relationship bonds are especially relevant in late life (Carstensen et al., 1999)
- Perhaps using jokes and humor can promote relationship closeness and satisfaction.
- OA are more likely to endorse affiliative rather than aggressive styles (Stanley, Lohani, & Isaacowitz, 2014).
- Typically, people tend to only have moderate insight into their own skills and abilities (Zell & Krizan, 2014). General and personal beliefs about humor change (i.e., “meta-humor”) remain unexamined.
- Goal:** Replicate previous findings of OA humor style preferences and investigate whether OA perceive sense of humor as changing across the lifespan.

Hypotheses

- Hypothesis 1:** OA will prefer affiliative humor over aggressive humor styles.
- Hypothesis 2:** OA will prefer self-enhancing over self-defeating humor styles.
- Hypothesis 3:** Participants will believe their personal sense of humor is improving with time, and currently better than average.
- Hypothesis 4:** Participants will perceive sense of humor as changing across the lifespan, generally.

METHOD

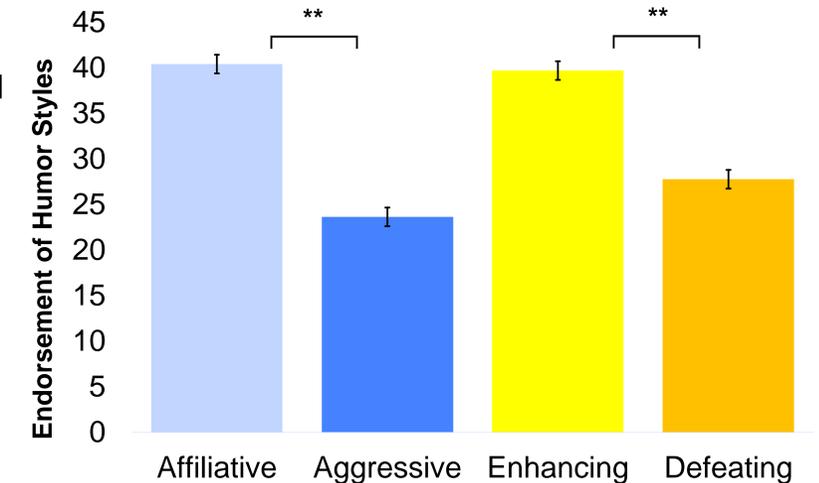
- Surveys were completed by 50 older adults (ages 53-87 years; $M = 72.6 \pm 7.8$; 69.2% Female) who were enrolled in a humor appreciation class in Georgia.
- Humor Style Questionnaire** (HSQ; Martin et al., 2003)
 - Affiliative Humor
I don't have to work very hard at making other people laugh—I seem to be a naturally humorous person.
 - Aggressive Humor
If someone makes a mistake, I will often tease them about it.
 - Self-Enhancing Humor
Even when I'm by myself, I'm amused by the absurdities of life.
 - Self-Defeating Humor
If I am having problems or feeling unhappy, I often cover it up by joking around so that even my closest friends don't know how I really feel.
- Perceived Humor Change Survey** (Adapted from Lineweaver & Hertzog, 1998)
 - On a visual analog scale (0-86 mm), participants indicated their perception of their sense of humor currently, ten years prior, and ten years in the future (personal humor).
 - Participants also indicated perceptions of humor change across the lifespan for the average 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, and 90 year adult (general humor).



RESULTS

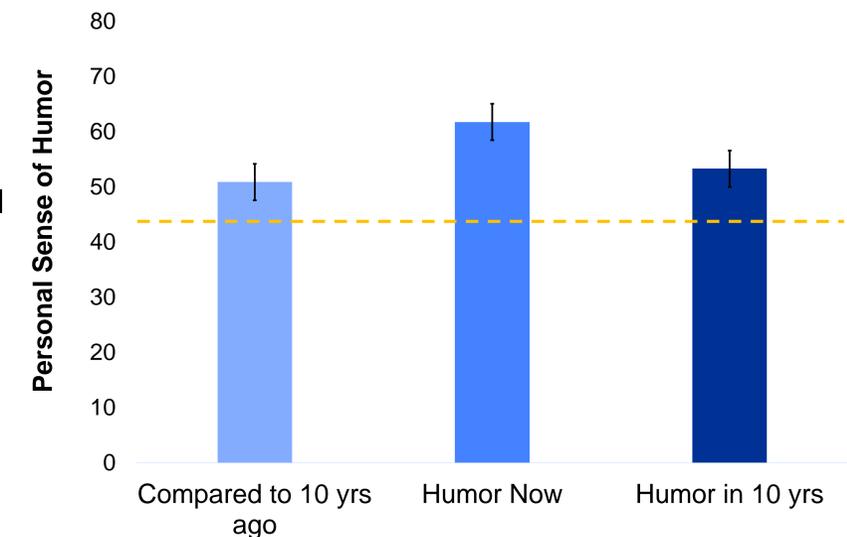
Preferences for Humor Styles: H₁ & H₂

- Participants significantly endorsed affiliative humor over aggressive humor ($t_{49} = 11.08, p < .001, d = 3.17$).
- Participants also preferred self-enhancing over self-defeating humor ($t_{49} = 8.09, p < .001, d = 2.31$).



Perceptions of Humor: H₃ & H₄

- Participants believed that their humor now is better than average ($t_{49} = 9.47, d = 2.71$), and better than it was 10 years prior ($t_{49} = 4.50, d = 1.29$). They also believed that their humor in 10 years will be better than it is now ($t_{49} = 4.92, d = 1.41$; all $ps < .001$).
- No evidence was obtained for perceptions of general humor change beginning at age 20.



DISCUSSION

- OA prefer affiliative and self-enhancing compared to aggressive and self-defeating humor styles. Perhaps these humor styles facilitate older adults' goals to cultivate relationships.
- Interestingly, OA believe their sense of humor is changing for the better. But, future studies should examine whether older adults are aware of the specific shifts in humor styles and whether these shifts are adaptive (e.g., for coping with losses associated with aging).