



AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Michael J. Brydone-Jack for the degree of Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Biology  
presented on May 15, 2012. Title: The Relationship between Self-Enhancing Humor,  
Self-Compassion, and Emotional Traits

Abstract Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

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This research focused on characterizing the relationship between self-enhancing humor, self-compassion, and long-term emotional traits.. It was hypothesized that self-enhancing humor would be related to self-compassion and the related subscales of mindfulness and self-kindness. In addition, it was predicted that self-enhancing humor would relate most strongly to positive emotional traits. The data supported both of these hypotheses, which allowed for the construction of a model of the psychological variables that predict self-enhancing humor, a task that has yet to be seriously undertaken. This research provides significant inspiration for further exploration of this topic.

Key Words: HSQ, Self-Enhancing Humor, Self-Compassion, Mindfulness, Self-Kindness

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The Relationship between Self-Enhancing Humor, Self-Compassion, and Emotional  
Traits

By

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A PROJECT

Submitted to

Oregon State University

University Honors College

In partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the  
degree of

Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Biology (Honors Associate)

Presented May 15, 2012

Commencement June 2012

Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Biology project of Michael J. Brydone-Jack  
presented on May 15, 2012.

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, University Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

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Michael J. Brydone-Jack, Author

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sarina Saturn, Ph. D. for igniting my interest in research, the passion with which she has guided my research, and the advice and patience given throughout this process.

John Edwards, Ph. D. and David Kerr, Ph. D. for their support and guidance as committee members.

Walter Piper, for his assistance throughout this process, especially as this project neared completion.

The research assistants Melody Howe, Cherrie Tse, Courtney Darr, Jillian Garrison, Spencer Hutchinson, Sam Colby, Ben Rose, Danielle Marca, and Megan Eng for their dedication and effort in making this project a success.

My wife, Ashley, for her consistent encouragement, patience, and emotional support, which gave me the endurance to complete this project.

My parents and grandparents for their continued support of all of my academic endeavors.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
INTRODUCTION .....	1
Overview of the Humor Experience .....	1
An Overview of Positive Emotions .....	2
Humor as a Coping Mechanism and Self-Enhancing Humor .....	4
Self-Compassion .....	5
The Profile of Individuals who Engage in Self-Enhancing Humor .....	6
Potential Health Benefits Associated with the Humor Experience .....	8
Expected Results from the Following Research .....	9
METHOD .....	11
Participants .....	11
Measures .....	11
Humor .....	11
Personality .....	11
Self-Compassion .....	12
Emotional Traits .....	12
Procedure .....	13
RESULTS .....	14
Correlations Between Self-Enhancing Humor and Personality .....	14
Correlations Between Self-Enhancing Humor and Self-Compassion .....	15
Correlations Between Self-Enhancing Humor and Emotional Traits .....	16
Variables Predicting Self-Enhancing Humor .....	18
Intercorrelations Between Self-Enhancing Humor, Mindfulness and Self-Kindness, and Sensuality .....	19

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

	<u>Page</u>
DISCUSSION .....	20
Relationship Between Self-Enhancing Humor and Self-Compassion.....	20
Relationship Between Self-Enhancing Humor and Emotional Traits .....	21
Variables Predicting Self-Enhancing Humor.....	22
REFERENCES .....	24
APPENDECIES .....	29
Appendix A HSQ-SE .....	29
Appendix B BFI.....	31
Appendix C SCS-SF .....	34
Appendix D ET .....	37



## LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
TABLE 1. Correlations Between HSQ-SE and BFI.....	14
TABLE 2. Correlations Between HSQ-SE and SCS-SF.....	15
TABLE 3. Correlations Between HSQ-SE and ET.....	16
TABLE 4. Summary of Simple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Self-Enhancing Humor.....	19
TABLE 5. Intercorrelations Between HSQ-SE, Mind/Kind, and Sensuality.....	19

## LIST OF APPENDICES

<u>Appendix</u>	<u>Page</u>
Appendix A HSQ-SE.....	29
Appendix B BFI.....	31
Appendix C SCS-SF.....	34
Appendix D ET.....	37

This thesis is dedicated to all those who belong to the community of young scholars in the University Honors College at Oregon State University. To those who have completed their thesis, congratulations! To those just beginning, I wish you success!

## The Relationship between Self-Enhancing Humor, Self-Compassion, and Emotional Traits

### Introduction

The experience of humor is universal and easily recognized. This phenomenon is characterized by laughter, facial displays, and the positive emotion of mirth. Millennia ago, the potential benefits of humor, and the harmful effects of negative emotions, were recognized in the biblical proverb, “a cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones” (Proverbs 17:22, New International Version). Despite long being recognized as a beneficial experience, it has proven difficult for researchers to pin down the extent to which humor is beneficial, the mechanisms by which humor elicits benefits, and the emotional profile of individuals most likely to engage in beneficial humor styles. Research difficulties aside, the collective humor experience is recognized as an essential component of the human experience, and is observed universally across human cultures (Apte, 1985; Lefcourt, 2001). Even children born without the ability to see or hear possess the ability to laugh: a testament to the innateness of the humor experience (Provine, 2000).

### *Overview of the Humor Experience*

The evolutionary origin of the humor can be traced back millions of years, arising in the social play of the early primates that preceded *Homo sapiens*. As *Homo sapiens* has evolved, and more advanced cognitive and linguistic abilities have developed, the humor experience has become richer and more complex (Caron, 2002; Gervais & Wilson, 2005). Moving out of the domain of pure social play, humor has been transformed into a universal method of communication and social influence, characterized by a

“lighthearted, nonserious attitude towards ideas and events” (Martin, 2007). In addition to a shift in attitudes about the world, the humor experience also involves cognitive shifts in perspective about certain life events. These cognitive shifts have implications for an individual’s ability to cope with stressful life experiences (Dixon, 1980).

Underlying the implicit social and communicative components of humor is an overtly positive emotional component. Research has demonstrated that when individuals are exposed to humor, they experience a positive emotion, which in turn generates improvements in both mood and affect (Szabo, 2003). Researchers have struggled to define the precise name for the positive emotion that accompanies the experience of humor, but Martin (2007) suggests that ‘mirth’ is the “distinctive emotion that is elicited by the perception of humor.” *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines mirth as “pleasurable feeling...joy, happiness, gaiety of mind, as manifested in jest and laughter; merriment, hilarity” (Simpson and Weiner, 1989, p. 841). Using this definition, it would appear that Martin is correct to suggest that researchers use the term ‘mirth’ to refer to the emotion elicited by the humor experience.

#### *An Overview of Positive Emotions*

Positive emotions, such as joy, hope, happiness, or mirth, have been shown to have numerous psychological and physiological benefits by a growing number of studies. In her review of existing research, Alice Isen (2003) found that when people experience positive emotions, they concomitantly experience gains in social skills and cognitive capacities. Further support for the experience of positive emotions as psychologically beneficial can be found in research conducted by Barbara Fredrickson (1998; 2001), in which she demonstrated that positive emotions cause cognitive changes in the individual

that remove feelings of anxiety, depression, and anger, which in turn serves to broaden their focus and improve their creativity. These cognitive changes help the individual find a social support network, which enables them to cope more effectively when faced with stressful situations.

In addition to the clear psychological benefits, positive emotions have also been shown to be beneficial to an individual from a physiological perspective. Research has demonstrated that when individuals experience positive emotions, such as mirth, they experience a decrease in the type of physiological arousal associated with the experience of negative emotions. Additionally, the physiological changes associated with positive emotion induction may enable the individual to cope more effectively with stress (Fredrickson and Levenson, 1998). Furthermore, research conducted by Panksepp (1993) demonstrated that the experience of mirth causes large-scale changes in the biochemistry of both the nervous and endocrine systems. Offering further support to the physiological benefit of humor, studies into the functioning of the brain indicate that the experience of humor activates the pathways of a well-recognized reward network (Mobbs et al., 2003).

In addition to the well-documented psychological and physiological benefits of positive emotions, such as mirth, research has also demonstrated that the experience of humor can play a key role in an individual's ability to cope with adversity and stressful situations (Lefcourt, 2001; Lefcourt and Martin, 1986). Martin (2007) suggests that the mechanism by which humor enables individuals to cope with stress is as follows: "by laughing at the fundamental incongruities of life and diminishing threats by turning them into objects of nonserious play, *humor is a way of refusing to be overcome by the people and situations, both large and small, that threaten our well-being* [Italics added]."

Through the cognitive shifts and reevaluations elicited by the experience of mirth, humor allows an individual to reevaluate the stressful aspects of a situation. The less-threatening perspective that these reevaluations elicit helps individuals to overcome their stress (Kuiper, Martin, and Olinger, 1993; Martin et al., 1993).

### *Humor as a Coping Mechanism and Self-Enhancing Humor*

The humor experience is clearly an adaptive phenomenon that can, in certain instances, help individuals cope with stress and adversity. While beneficial when used in certain instances, other uses of humor may actually be detrimental to an individual's well-being (Martin, 2007). In referencing humor then, it is important for researchers to choose the style of humor that most closely matches the phenomenon under study. In the process of developing the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ), Martin and his colleagues (2002) conceptualized four distinct and mutually exclusive "humor styles": two positive and two negative. The two positive styles identified are 'self-enhancing' and 'affiliative,' whereas the two negative styles are 'self-defeating' and 'aggressive.' Both self-enhancing and self-defeating humor occur solely within the domain of the individual, while affiliative and aggressive humor occur in social situations involving other people (Martin, 2002). Further research supports both the construct and discriminant validity of each humor style identified, verifying their usability in future research (Doris, 2004; Kazarian and Martin, 2004; Kuiper et al., 2004; Martin et al., 2003; Saroglou and Scariot, 2002). Of the four styles of humor identified in the HSQ, only the positive, 'self-enhancing' style of humor is germane to the topic of this thesis, thus it is the only style of humor that will receive further discussion.

Self-enhancing humor is one of two recognized “healthy” humor styles, and it is characterized by “a generally humorous outlook on life, a tendency to be frequently amused by the incongruities of life, and [the ability] to maintain a humorous perspective even in the face of stress or adversity” (Martin et al., 2002). The use of self-enhancing humor is important for individual well-being and his or her ability to handle stressful events because it is associated with the use of cognitive reappraisals when stressful situations arise. This style of humor is most strongly associated with the idea of “coping humor,” and it can serve as a cognitive defense mechanism, allowing individuals who make use of it to cope with stressful life events (Martin et al., 2002). This coping is achieved through a series of cognitive reappraisals, through which individuals come to view situations in a more realistic, less-threatening light (Martin et al., 2002). In terms of other variables related to personality and mood, this style of humor is positively associated with indicators of psychological health and well-being, such as self-esteem, positive emotions, optimism, social support, and intimacy, while it is negatively associated with negative moods and mental health conditions, such as depression or anxiety (Martin, 2007).

### *Self-Compassion*

In response to criticism of the usefulness of self-esteem as a measure of psychological health, self-compassion has been proposed as a multi-faceted construct that encompasses a much broader view of an individual’s well-being, and it shares some of the features seen in self-enhancing humor (Neff, 2003; Baumeister, Smart, and Boden, 1996). In particular, self-compassion involves being open to the experience of one’s own suffering without shying away from the experience, and also being open to healing



oneself through kindness, instead of self-criticism (Neff, 2003). This process involves viewing one's situation and shortcomings from a realistic perspective, and also viewing one's experience in relation to the overarching human experience. The result of high self-compassion is that the individual is able "to more accurately perceive and rectify maladaptive patterns of thought, feeling and behavior" (Neff, 2003; Brown, 1999).

There are three primary components that together determine an individual's level of self-compassion: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness (Neff, 2003). Self-kindness involves avoiding harsh self-judgment in favor of a more kind, understanding perspective (Neff, 2003; Fredrickson, 2001; Jopling, 2000). Self-kindness helps individuals deal with stressful events in their lives by allowing them to view their own faults from a realistic perspective (Frederickson, 2001). An individual's level of common humanity is the extent to which he or she views his or her own circumstances in relation to the common human experience, helping to reduce levels of self-pity (Goldstein and Michaels, 1985; Scheff, 1981). Finally, mindfulness is the process of "holding one's painful thoughts and feelings in balanced awareness rather than over-identifying with them" (Neff, 2003). Individuals who are more mindful of his or her own situation are less likely to experience depression (Hayes, Strosahl, and Wilson, 1999; Teasdale et al., 2000) or maladaptive physical and psychological health effects (Blatt et al., 1982; Bowlby, 1980; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991) as the result of stressful life events.

#### *The Profile of Individuals who Engage in Self-Enhancing Humor*

Researchers have hypothesized that those individuals who possess an above-average sense of humor are also more likely to possess successful social skills, which he or she will use to develop more rewarding interpersonal relationships (Bell et al., 1986;

Masten, 1986). This, in turn, bolsters the individual through times of stress by creating a strong social support network (Cohen, 1988; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Orth-Gomer, 1994). Research supporting these hypotheses has demonstrated that certain individuals are better equipped to cope with stress and adversity than others as a result of differences in personality, sense of humor, and emotional traits (Carver, Sheier, & Weintraub, 1989; Cohen & Edwards, 1989). An individual's personality is his or her "habitual way of thinking, feeling, perceiving, and reacting to the world" (Magnavita, 2002, p.16). In terms of the Five-Factor Model of Personality, the use of self-enhancing humor tends to positively correlate most strongly with Openness to Experience, while it tends to negatively correlate with Neuroticism (Martin et al., 2002). Both of these factors of personality are enduring characteristics, but they are associated with different traits. Openness to Experience is related to an individual's creativity, the extent to which he or she is in touch with their inner feelings, and the level of intellectual curiosity that an individual possess (John and Srivastava, 1999; Martin et al., 2002). On the other hand, those who score high in neuroticism are more likely to experience negative emotional states with greater frequency and intensity than an individual who scores low (John and Srivastava, 1999). While researchers have successfully described the personality profile of those individuals most likely to engage in self-enhancing humor, an equally important profile that has received little study is the emotional profile of these individuals. Thus, one of the goals of the present study is to elucidate the emotional traits of individuals who engage in self-enhancing humor.

*Potential Health Benefits Associated with the Humor Experience*

Stepping outside of the scientific literature and into the realm of folk-medicine (or quack medicine, depending on your perspective), humor has been credited with miraculous qualities that include the ability to include such disparate illnesses as cancer, depression, or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). In some cases, entire organizations have been created whose sole purpose is to provide an avenue for individuals to experience humor in their daily lives. Unfortunately, the vast majority of these ‘abilities’ have no basis in scientific fact and do not stand up to rigorous, scientific experimentation. While humor does not possess the ability to cure serious diseases, such as cancer or AIDS, there is a wealth of evidence suggesting that humor has an important role to play when it comes to certain components of health and overall wellness (Martin, 2007).

In theory, the primary mechanism by which humor benefits the health of the individual is through shifts in cognitive perspective, which in turn reduce the negative health effects associated with psychosocial stress (Martin, 2007). Research has demonstrated that both acute and chronic psychosocial stress negatively impacts health in a variety of ways, including suppression of the immune system (Uchino, Kiecolt-Glaser, and Glaser, 2000; Adler & Hillhouse, 1996; O’Leary, 1990), increasing the risk of contracting infectious disease (Cohen et al., 1998; Cohen and Williamson, 1991), and increasing the risk of developing cardiovascular disease (Elser, 1998). By enabling an individual to appraise a stressful situation from an amusing point of view, a humorous outlook on life can help individuals more effectively cope with stress, which in turn enhances his or her feelings of well-being and control of the situation (Martin, 1993;

Martin and Lefcourt, 1983). Further studies investigating the stress-moderating effects of humor have found significant negative correlations between an individual's sense of humor and his or her likelihood to become depressed (Anderson and Arnoult, 1989; Nezu, Nezu, and Blissett, 1988; Olverholser, 1992; Porterfield, 1987; Safranek and Schill, 1982), to become emotionally burned out (Fry, 1995), or to experience significant mood disturbance (Labott and Martin, 1987; Lefcourt et al., 1995). In addition, studies have also demonstrated that individuals who are able to actively create humor in the face of stressful situations experience a diminished stress response in comparison to those individuals that are unable to generate humor (Lehman et al., 1002; Lefcourt and Martin, 1986; Newman and Stone, 1996). Clearly, humor has a strong role to play in helping the individual cope with stress and adversity.

#### *Expected Results from the Present Research*

Individuals who deal with chronic stress often experience negative health outcomes, a fact that is of great concern for researchers and medical professionals alike. Thus, research that investigates mechanisms to reduce chronic stress is of great practical importance. As demonstrated above, self-enhancing humor is a promising mechanism that could help individuals deal with stress and other adverse situations they encounter in their lives. The aims of the following research are three-fold: to investigate the relationship between self-enhancing humor and self-compassion, to investigate the emotional profiles of individuals who engage in self-enhancing humor, and to develop a working model for the variables that predict use of self-enhancing humor.

The construct of self-compassion shares many features with self-enhancing humor, especially the use of cognitive shifts that allow an individual to view their

situation from a more realistic perspective. The subscales of mindfulness and self-kindness are the most strongly associated with these shifts, therefore it is expected that these two subscales will most strongly correlate with self-enhancing humor. Due to similarities in construction, it is also expected that there will be a significant relationship between the entire construct of self-compassion and self-enhancing humor.

Of all the research that has investigated the use of self-enhancing humor, very little has explored the relationship between self-enhancing humor and long-term emotional traits. Therefore, the following research will attempt to elucidate the manner and degree of relationship between self-enhancing humor and various emotional traits. As noted above, humor is related to the experience of mirth. As such, it is expected that self-enhancing humor will positively correlate with positive emotions, while negatively correlating with negative emotions.

Finally, while there is a significant body of research demonstrating both the validity of self-enhancing humor as a measure and the positive outcomes its usage is associated with, there is little research documenting what factors predict an individual's use of self-enhancing humor. The majority of research has focused on the Big Five Indicators of personality, while leaving out other traits such as self-compassion or an individual's emotional profile. Therefore, the following research will attempt to generate a model that begins to demonstrate which variables predict an individual's use of self-enhancing humor.

## METHOD

### Participants

A total of 64 participants took part in this study, 23 males (mean age = 21 years, SD = 2.70 years) and 41 females (mean age = 21.5 years, SD = 5.08 years). Participants were recruited for this study using the online SONA registration system that is available to all students enrolled in psychology courses at Oregon State University. Participants who took part in this study received three hours of extra credit in their psychology course for their participation. Screening criteria ensured that all participants were at least 18 years old. All participants were undergraduate students at Oregon State University enrolled in a psychology course.

### Materials

#### *Humor*

*Humor Styles Questionnaire – Self-Enhancing Style (HSQ-SE)*. (Martin et al., 2003). The HSQ-SE is an eight-item scale that measures the extent to which a respondent uses self-enhancing humor. The HSQ-SE has an internal consistency of .81 and a median test-retest correlation of .81. The respondent is given a statement, such as “Even when I’m by myself, “I’m often amused by the absurdities of life,” and asked to rank their agreement with the statement on a scale from one (“Totally Disagree”) to seven (“Totally Agree”). See Appendix A for more examples.

#### *Personality*

*The Big Five Inventory (BFI)*. (John and Srivastava, 1999). The BFI is a 44-item scale that measures a respondent’s personality in terms of the “Big Five” dimensions of personality. The BFI has an internal consistency ranging from 0.81 to 0.87 and a mean

test-retest correlation of 0.85. The respondent is given a statement that begins “I see Myself as Someone Who...” followed by a personality description, such as “has an assertive personality.” The respondent is then asked to rank the extent to which they agree with the statement on a scale from one (“Disagree Strongly”) to five (“Agree Strongly”). See Appendix B for more examples.

### *Self-Compassion*

*Self-Compassion Scale – Short Form (SCS-SF)*. (Raes, Neff, and Van Gucht, 2011). The SCS-SF is a 12-item scale that measures the extent to which a respondent is “self-compassionate.” The SCS-SF has an internal consistency of 0.86, with internal consistencies for each of the subscales ranging from 0.54 to 0.75. All subscales except for self-kindness have an internal consistency greater than 0.60. No test-retest correlations have been reported. The respondent is given a statement, such as “When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation,” and asked to rank their agreement with the statement on a scale from one (“Almost never”) to five (“Almost always”). See Appendix C for more examples.

### *Emotional Traits*

*Emotional Traits (ET)*. (Impett and Oliver, unpublished scale). The ET is an unpublished, 23-item scale that measures the respondent’s typical emotional profile. As an unpublished scale, no measures of internal consistency or test-retest correlations have been reported. The respondent is given a statement that begins “TYPICALLY, I fell...” followed by a triplet of related emotions, such as “Happy/pleased/joyful.” The respondent is then asked to rank how well this description matches their usual feelings. See Appendix D for more examples.

### Procedure

Participants completed each of the scales online, outside of the lab environment by logging on to an online survey system. These scales were part of a larger set of scales that took approximately one hour for participants to complete.



## RESULTS

The scores on the HSQ-SE ranged from 1.75 to 6.25 ( $M = 4.32$ ). Consistent with previous research, there were no significant differences ( $p > 0.05$ ) between male and female participants (Martin et al., 2002). Any age effects were indeterminate because the majority of participants were undergraduate students, ranging from 18-22 years old. However, it is worth mentioning that previous research found significant differences in the use of self-enhancing humor between older and younger women, with older women using it more frequently; this same effect was not found for men (Martin et al., 2002).

*Correlations Between Self-Enhancing Humor and Personality*

To confirm that the results of this study were consistent with previous studies of self-enhancing humor, Spearman correlations were calculated between HSQ-SE and BFI, across the entire sample. The correlations between these two measures are presented in Table 1. Consistent with the literature, openness to experience was positively correlated with self-enhancing humor ( $r = 0.29$ ,  $p < .01$ ), while neuroticism was negatively correlated ( $r = -0.29$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Table 1.

Correlations Between HSQ-SE and BFI

	HSQ-SE
Neuroticism	<b>-0.29*</b>
Extraversion	0.16
Openness	<b>0.29*</b>
Agreeableness	0.08
Conscientiousness	0.001

†  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

*Correlations Between Self-Enhancing Humor and Self-Compassion*

One of the objectives of this study was to determine the relationship between traits of self-compassion and the use of self-enhancing humor. In order to characterize this relationship, Spearman correlations were calculated between the HSQ-SE and the indicators of self-compassion measured by the SCS-SF. The correlations are shown in Table 2. Of the seven traits measured, Mindfulness ( $r = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and Self-Kindness ( $r = 0.36$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) correlated most strongly with self-enhancing humor. Also of note, Total Self-Compassion was weakly correlated with HSQ-SE ( $r = 0.24$ ,  $p < 0.10$ ).

Table 2.

Correlations Between HSQ-SE and SCS-SF

	HSQ-SE
Self-Kindness	<b>0.36<sup>**</sup></b>
Self-Judgement	-0.02
Common Humanity	<b>0.28<sup>*</sup></b>
Isolation	-0.13
Mindfulness	<b>0.41<sup>**</sup></b>
Over-Identification	-0.05
Total Self-Compassion	<b>0.24<sup>†</sup></b>

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<sup>†</sup>  $p < 0.10$ , <sup>\*</sup>  $p < 0.05$ , <sup>\*\*</sup>  $p < 0.01$

*Correlations Between Self-Enhancing Humor and Emotional Traits*

One of the primary objectives of this study is to describe the emotional profile of individuals who engage in self-enhancing humor. In order to develop this profile, it was necessary to determine which emotional traits relate to self-enhancing humor and which do not relate. This was accomplished by calculating Spearman correlations between each of the 23 emotional traits tested by the ET and the HSQ-SE. The correlations are shown in Table 3. Positive emotional traits tended to positively correlate most strongly with self-enhancing humor. These positive emotions include happiness ( $r = 0.48, p < .01$ ), connectedness ( $r = 0.45, p < .01$ ), delight ( $r = 0.37, p < .01$ ), appreciativeness ( $r = 0.35, p < .01$ ), sensuality ( $r = 0.34, p < .01$ ), and optimism ( $r = 0.32, p < .01$ ). Conversely, negative emotional traits tended to negatively correlate most strongly with self-enhancing humor. These include sadness ( $r = -0.24, p < 0.05$ ), anger ( $r = -0.24, p < 0.10$ ), and loneliness ( $r = -0.24, p < 0.10$ ).

Table 3.

Correlations Between HSQ-SE and ET

	HSQ-SE
Affectionate/Loving/Caring (Affection)	-0.01
Amused/Having Fun (Amusement)	<b>0.21<sup>†</sup></b>
Angry/Irritable/Frustrated (Anger)	<b>-0.24<sup>†</sup></b>
Anxious/Nervous (Anxious)	-0.105
Awe/Sense of Wonder (Awe)	<b>0.28<sup>*</sup></b>

Compassionate/Sympathetic (Compassion)	<b>0.28<sup>*</sup></b>
Grateful/Appreciative/Thankful (Appreciativeness)	<b>0.35<sup>**</sup></b>
Happy/Pleased/Joyful (Happiness)	<b>0.48<sup>**</sup></b>
Interested/Attentive (Engagement)	<b>0.27<sup>*</sup></b>
Proud/Feel Good About Myself (Self Esteem)	<b>0.27<sup>*</sup></b>
Relaxed/Calm (Calm)	<b>0.22<sup>†</sup></b>
Sad/Depressed/Down (Sadness)	<b>-0.30<sup>*</sup></b>
Lonely/Isolated (Loneliness)	<b>-0.24<sup>†</sup></b>
Cared About/Loved/Connected (Connectedness)	<b>0.45<sup>**</sup></b>
Delighted/Savoring/Pleased (Delight)	<b>0.37<sup>**</sup></b>
Disgust/Distaste/Revulsion (Disgust)	0.04
Physically Uncomfortable/Not at Ease (Discomfort)	-0.05
Sexual/Desiring/Flirtatious (Sensuality)	<b>0.34<sup>**</sup></b>
Hopeful/Optimistic/Encouraged (Optimism)	<b>0.32<sup>**</sup></b>
Surprised (Surprise)	<b>0.30<sup>*</sup></b>
Embarrassed/Self-Conscious (Embarrassment)	-0.05
Ashamed/Humiliated/Disgraced (Shame)	0.06
Guilty/Blameworthy (Guilt)	0.08

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<sup>†</sup> p<0.10, <sup>\*</sup> p<0.05, <sup>\*\*</sup> p<0.01

*Variables Predicting Self-Enhancing Humor*

One of the goals of this study was to develop a model that would explain some of the variation that is observed in the HSQ-SE. In order to develop this model, multiple regression analysis was used to test if an individual's sensuality and their combined mindfulness and self-kindness significantly predicted their scores on the HSQ-SE. For the regression analysis, mindfulness and self-kindness were combined into a single variable, such that an individual's combined scores of both served as a predictor of self-enhancing humor. This was done because mindfulness and self-kindness were significantly correlated with each other ( $r = 0.55, p < .01$ ), and only served as a significant predictor of self-enhancing humor when taken together. Additionally, the reader may wonder as to why sensuality was chosen as a variable predicting self-enhancing humor, and not a more likely candidate such as happiness or amusement. This selection arose during the data analysis process. In a previous sample of data, a very strong correlation was found between an individual's attitudes towards sexuality and their propensity to use self-enhancing humor. Although this correlation was not present in the present sample, a similar relationship was found between self-enhancing humor and an individual's propensity to experience feelings of sexuality and sensuality. The results of this analysis indicated that these two predictors explained 23.0% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.23$ ,  $F(2,63) = 10.7, p < .01$ ). It was found that sensuality significantly predicted an individual's score on the HSQ-SE ( $\beta = 0.30, p < .01$ ), as did mindfulness and self-kindness ( $\beta = 0.37, p < .01$ ).

Table 4.

Summary of Simple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Self-Enhancing Humor (N = 66)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Mind/Kind	0.54	0.16	0.37
Sensuality	0.18	0.07	0.30
$R^2$		0.25	
$F$		<b>10.7**</b>	
* $p < 0.05$ , ** $p < 0.01$			

*Intercorrelations Between Self-Enhancing Humor, Mindfulness and Self-Kindness, and Sensuality*

To ensure that the variables chosen for the multiple regression were not explaining the same phenomenon, Spearman correlations were calculated. The correlations are shown in Table 5. The combined variable of mindfulness and self-kindness was not found to correlate significantly with sensuality ( $r = 0.08$ ,  $p > 0.1$ ).

Table 5.

Intercorrelations Between HSQ-SE, Mind/Kind, and Sensuality

	1	2	3
1. HSQ-SE	--	<b>0.43**</b>	<b>0.34**</b>
2. Mind/Kind		--	0.08
3. Sensuality			--
† $p < 0.10$ , * $p < 0.05$ , ** $p < 0.01$			

## DISCUSSION

Previous studies (Martin et al., 2002) have found that self-enhancing humor is positively correlated to openness to experience and negatively correlated to neuroticism. Consistent with previous studies, the results of this study found the same relationship between self-enhancing humor and the big five measures of personality.

### *Relationship Between Self-Enhancing Humor and Self-Compassion*

There is very little research in the literature describing the relationship between self-enhancing humor and the concept of self-compassion. It was hypothesized that the two concepts should be related because both involve cognitive reappraisals of one's situation, such that an individual is able to evaluate their own situation from a more realistic perspective (Martin et al., 2002; Neff, 2003). While the results of this study only found a weak correlation between self-enhancing humor and the entire concept of self-compassion, this is only part of the story.

When the individual components of self-compassion are analyzed individually, the data suggests that there is a very strong relationship between self-enhancing humor and the concepts of mindfulness and self-kindness. At their core, each of these three concepts share an emphasis on cognitive shifts in perspective that help the individual view their problems from a more realistic point of view. While similar in construction, each concept is distinct. Recall that mindfulness refers to an individual's ability to view their own thoughts or emotional reactions to their situation in 'balanced perspective' to what is actually occurring, which helps the individual avoid wallowing in self-pity, which is counterproductive (Neff, 2003). The difference between mindfulness and self-kindness

is subtle: this concept refers to the ability of the individual to view his or her own circumstances from a nonjudgmental perspective, in essence, it means that the individual avoids being overly self-critical (Neff, 2003). At its core, self-enhancing humor allows the individual to cope with their situation by viewing it from a more realistic perspective, thus it is no surprise that these concepts are related.

Given the degree of similarity in construction that these three concepts share, it is possible that all three are measuring what is essentially one concept. Further research is necessary to better elucidate the relationship between each of these concepts. It is also worth noting that the current study took advantage of the short-form self-compassion scale, not the full scale. One of the potential drawbacks of using this scale is that the discriminant validity of each of the subscales is significantly reduced. Thus, future research attempting to characterize this relationship should take advantage of the full self-compassion scale.

#### *Relationship Between Self-Enhancing Humor and Emotional Traits*

Previous studies of self-enhancing humor (Martin et al., 2002) have demonstrated that the experience of this particular form of humor is positively related to the experience of positive emotions and negatively related to the experience of negative emotions. Despite this characterization, little research has been conducted examining the relationship between self-enhancing humor and emotional traits.

Consistent with previous research, the present study found that self-enhancing humor most strongly correlates with positive emotions, such as happiness, delight, and optimism. In addition to the expected correlations with positive emotions, self-enhancing humor also correlated strongly with appreciativeness, connectedness, and sensuality.



While it is hard to speculate on the nature of this relationship without further research, these findings are certainly interesting and suggestive of future investigation.

Unsurprisingly, the experience of self-enhancing humor was negatively correlated with the negative emotions of sadness, anger, and loneliness. Future research should continue to investigate the emotional profile of individuals who engage in self-enhancing humor using an established scale for discerning emotional traits.

#### *Variables Predicting Self-Enhancing Humor*

Previous studies (Martin et al., 2002) have focused on the relationship between self-enhancing humor and dimensions of personality, emotion, and physical health. While these relationships are important to elucidate, little research has been conducted on the individual variables that predict the individual's use of self-enhancing humor. While the model developed in the present study only explains a small portion of the total variation observed in self-enhancing humor, but it is a step towards a more comprehensive understanding of what makes certain individuals more likely than others to engage in self-enhancing humor. Of all the variables found to correlate with self-enhancing humor, only mindfulness, self-kindness, and self-reported sensuality were found to be significant predictors. In the development of this model, it was found that if an individual's combined mindfulness and self-kindness served as a better predictor than either variable alone, thus it is the combined measure that is reported in the results. The nature of this relationship is not fully understood, and caution must be exercised since the data for this relationship was drawn from the short-form of the self-compassion scale.

Humor research stands on the precipice of an entirely new frontier, one that promises a more comprehensive understanding of a universal human experience. Though

long recognized as beneficial to human health, the precise mechanisms through which certain types of humor enacts positive change and the emotional profile of those individuals predisposed towards engaging in these styles of humor have remained shrouded in a cloud of mystery. The results of the present study, while a far cry from a comprehensive understanding of the humor experience, improves upon the current understanding and cracks the door open into entirely new avenues of humor research. In addition, it affirms the basic understanding that humor is a beneficial to psychological well-being and, in the words of Henry Ward Beecher, that “A person without a sense of humor is like a wagon without springs. It’s jolted by every pebble on the road” (Beecher, 1869). As research presses forward, it promises to expand the understanding of humor and offer innovative (and enjoyable) mechanisms for individuals to improve his or her health.

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## APPENDIX A





## APPENDIX B

## The Big Five Inventory (BFI)

Here are a number of characteristics that may or may not apply to you. For example, do you agree that you are someone who likes to spend time with others? Please write a number next to each statement to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement.

Disagree strongly 1	Disagree a little 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree a little 4	Agree strongly 5
---------------------------	---------------------------	------------------------------------	------------------------	------------------------

I see Myself as Someone Who...

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| ___ 1. Is talkative                            | ___ 23. Tends to be lazy                              |
| ___ 2. Tends to find fault with others         | ___ 24. Is emotionally stable, not easily upset       |
| ___ 3. Does a thorough job                     | ___ 25. Is inventive                                  |
| ___ 4. Is depressed, blue                      | ___ 26. Has an assertive personality                  |
| ___ 5. Is original, comes up with new ideas    | ___ 27. Can be cold and aloof                         |
| ___ 6. Is reserved                             | ___ 28. Perseveres until the task is finished         |
| ___ 7. Is helpful and unselfish with others    | ___ 29. Can be moody                                  |
| ___ 8. Can be somewhat careless                | ___ 30. Values artistic, aesthetic experiences        |
| ___ 9. Is relaxed, handles stress well         | ___ 31. Is sometimes shy, inhibited                   |
| ___ 10. Is curious about many different things | ___ 32. Is considerate and kind to almost everyone    |
| ___ 11. Is full of energy                      | ___ 33. Does things efficiently                       |
| ___ 12. Starts quarrels with others            | ___ 34. Remains calm in tense situations              |
| ___ 13. Is a reliable worker                   | ___ 35. Prefers work that is routine                  |
| ___ 14. Can be tense                           | ___ 36. Is outgoing, sociable                         |
| ___ 15. Is ingenious, a deep thinker           | ___ 37. Is sometimes rude to others                   |
| ___ 16. Generates a lot of enthusiasm          | ___ 38. Makes plans and follows through with them     |
| ___ 17. Has a forgiving nature                 | ___ 39. Gets nervous easily                           |
| ___ 18. Tends to be disorganized               | ___ 40. Likes to reflect, play with ideas             |
| ___ 19. Worries a lot                          | ___ 41. Has few artistic interests                    |
| ___ 20. Has an active imagination              | ___ 42. Likes to cooperate with others                |
| ___ 21. Tends to be quiet                      | ___ 43. Is easily distracted                          |
| ___ 22. Is generally trusting                  | ___ 44. Is sophisticated in art, music, or literature |

Please check: Did you write a number in front of each statement?

BFI scale scoring ("R" denotes reverse-scored items):

Extraversion: 1, 6R, 11, 16, 21R, 26, 31R, 36

Agreeableness: 2R, 7, 12R, 17, 22, 27R, 32, 37R, 42

Conscientiousness: 3, 8R, 13, 18R, 23R, 28, 33, 38, 43R

Neuroticism: 4, 9R, 14, 19, 24R, 29, 34R, 39

Openness: 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35R, 40, 41R, 44

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## APPENDIX C

### HOW I TYPICALLY ACT TOWARDS MYSELF IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Please read each statement carefully before answering. To the left of each item, indicate how often you behave in the stated manner, using the following scale:

**Almost  
never**

**1**

**2**

**3**

**4**

**Almost  
always**

**5**

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. When I fail at something important to me I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. When I'm feeling down, I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I try to see my failings as part of the human condition.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. When I'm going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. When something upsets me I try to keep my emotions in balance.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. When I fail at something that's important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. When I'm feeling down I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that's wrong.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. I'm disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. I'm intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.

Coding Key:

Self-Kindness Items: 2, 6

Self-Judgment Items: 11, 12

Common Humanity Items: 5, 10

Isolation Items: 4, 8

Mindfulness Items: 3, 7

Over-identified Items: 1, 9

Subscale scores are computed by calculating the mean of subscale item responses. To compute a total self-compassion score, reverse score the negative subscale items - self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification (i.e., 1 = 5, 2 = 4, 3 = 3, 4 = 2, 5 = 1) - then compute a total mean.

## APPENDIX D



**Please choose what represents how you feel IN GENERAL.**

**"TYPICALLY, I feel..."**

[illegible]

