

## **HUMOUR STYLES AS PREDICTORS OF FORGIVENESS AMONG UNDERGRADUATES**

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### **Abstract**

*Attribution theory assumed that internal factors such as (humour styles) and external factors may explain forgiveness 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: Rey forgiveness scale (RFS) and humour styles questionnaire (HSQ). The study adopted a predictive correlation design and the hypothesis was tested with multiple regression analysis. The results indicated that humour styles; affiliative humour, self-enhancing humour, aggressive humor and self-defeating humour did not predict forgiveness significantly. The outcome of the study suggested for the first time a framework for understanding the role of humour styles on forgiveness. It was suggested that affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive and self-defeating humour styles should not be encouraged and included in the University's programs as part of general studies, routine seminars, conferences and orientations of new students because it is not effective for peaceful coexistence among undergraduates.*

**Keywords:** forgiveness, humour styles: affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive and self-defeating

### **Background to the Study**

Forgiveness is an essential variable in maintenance of peace and order for mutual relationship among nations, ethnic groups and individuals (James, 2018; Pazak, 2020). People are expected to forgive one another their transgressions for peaceful coexistence but most of time,

forgiveness is not achieved which lead nations, towns, families, individuals and undergraduates in to crisis (Haldun & Opeyemi, 2016).

Generally, evidence has shown that nations, towns, ethnic groups, religious groups and even undergraduates engage one another in one skirmishes or the other due to their inability to forgive one another their transgressions (Adeyemi, Ekundayo & Alonge, 2010; Nabai, 2018; Okeke, Nweke, Ngene, Anyadnba, Mgbechi, and Nwagbo, 2012). Following these high incidences of crisis that may arise as a result of inability of people to forgive one another their transgressions, there is need to explore the risk or preventive factors that are related to forgiveness. This is because, evidence from empirical findings showed that internal factors contributed in attaining forgiveness (Brose, Rye, Lutz-Zois, & Ross, 2005; Abid, shafiq, Naz, & Raiz, 2015). Based on the above problems, there is need to investigate humor styles (internal factors) as predictors of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is victim letting go of negative affect (e.g., hostility), negative cognitions (e.g. thoughts of revenge) and negative behavior (e.g, verbal aggression) towards an offender (Hampes, 2016, Rye, Loiacono, Folck, Olszewski, Heim and Media, 2001; Worthington, Lavelock, Witvliet, Rye, Tsang & Toussaint, 2015 ). This conceptualization of forgiveness is related to Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, and Weir (2003) humour styles.

### **Humour styles**

Humour styles are assumed to predict forgiveness. Humour style is person's consistent way of humour in daily life that is, one's distinctive and stable prototype of humour behaviours and attitudes (Martin, et al., 2003). Martin et al (2003) categorized humour styles in to two; favourable (affiliative and self-enhancing) and unfavorable (self-defeating and aggressive) humour styles. These four domains of humour styles are form of personality traits which includes: affiliative, self-enhancing, self-defeating and aggressive humours (Martin, et al., 2003). Affiliative humor is a style of humour used to entertain people, put them at ease which may boost good association with other people (Martin, et al, 2003). This means that once there is a cordial relationship between two or more people, that the relationship may equally breed

forgiveness among people, because they may be seeing each other as one, as they discuss and laugh together. Self-enhancing humor is a style of humor that enables one to deal with stressful situation by taking humorous perspectives of them (Martin, et al, 2003). This means that self-enhancing humor may enable one to cope or adjust easily with any stressful situation that may make one sad by finding the funny or amusing side of the situation that may bring about forgiveness. Self-defeating humor is a style of humor that is characterized by the use of potentially harmful humor towards the self in order to gain support from others (Martin, et al, 2003). This means laughing along with others when being ridiculed or even making oneself the butt of their own jokes and make fun of oneself. This style of humor may reduce aggression among people which may equally bring peace and peaceful co-existence which in long run may breed forgiveness among people. Aggressive humor as a style of humor is use to attack or put down other people which involves teasing, ridicule, mockery, antagonism, criticism and ridiculed types of humor. This type of humor seems to be playful and fun but the intent is to hurt others. For examples, prejudices, stereotypes, racism, and sexism are types of aggressive humor style. This style of humor may make the victim not to forgive the offenders easily. Sometimes both the victims and offenders may forgive themselves depending on the victim's personality. Based on the Martin et al (2003) humour styles, it is assumed that humor styles may be very important in one's life, because it is a part of social relationship that help in maintaining forgiveness which may equally bring about peaceful co-existence in human societies.

### **Statement of the problem**

Forgiveness breads peaceful coexistence among people but it is hard to maintain in the society. It has been observed that vengeance (unforgiveness) breeds crisis among families, towns, religious groups and individuals (Bajwa & Khalid, 2015; Chester & Dewall, 2017). Many theoretical assumptions have been used in trying to understand forgiveness. One of the theoretical assumptions believed that internal factors are related to forgiveness. However, there are many factors which could be categorized as internal factors. Therefore, within the scope of this study, humour styles (internal factors) were tested in statistical model using

quantitative data to see the extent of its contribution as a preventive or risk factor in forgiveness among undergraduates.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Heider, (1958) attribution theory formed theoretical framework that guided hypothesis for this research. Theory of attribution may assume to be in relationship with humour styles (affiliative, self-enhancing, self-defeating and aggressive) and forgiveness. Attribution theory states that people behave in a certain way as a result of internal factors (traits or attitudes) or as a result of external factors (situation or environment). Based on this theory, a victim may forgive offender easily if the victim infers that the offender behavior is as a result of external factors which is beyond the control of the offender unlike when the victim infers that the behavior of the offender is as a result of the offender's internal factors (personality). It is assume that Humour styles (affiliative humour, self-enhancing humour, aggressive humor and self-defeating humour) as internal factors will not predict forgiveness among undergraduates.

Empirically, Fincham, Paleari, and Regalia (2002) studied the association between marital quality attributions, empathy and forgiveness and found that victims' positive association with an offender promotes more positive attributions of offenders' spouses' behavior which helps in promoting the victim's forgiveness directly and indirectly through reactions and emotional empathy. Hampes (2016) reported that Davis and Gold (2011) found that offenders' remorse reduced victim's attribution of behavioural stability and thus increased empathy and forgiveness. Hampes (2016) reported also that self-enhancing humour positively and significantly predicted and correlated with four measures of forgiveness; self-defeating humour negatively and significantly predicted forgiveness while aggressive humour and affiliative humour did not significantly predict forgiveness.

### **Hypothesis**

This study hypothesised that different domains of Humour styles; (i) affiliative, (ii) self-enhancing, (iii) self-defeating and (iv)aggressive humour would significantly predict forgiveness among undergraduates.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

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

### **Instruments**

Two instruments were used for the study; Rye Forgiveness Scale (RFS) developed by Rye, et al., (2001) and Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) developed by (Martin, et al., 2003).

#### **Rye Forgiveness Scale**

Rye et al. (2001) developed and validated RFS to measure levels of forgiveness. RFS is a fifteen items scale scored on five Likert format. The first item in RFS was scored (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree), item 1,3,4,5,8,10,12 and 14 were reverse scored. In this study RFS was tested for internal consistency and Cronbach Alpha reliability of .75 was obtained:

#### **Humor styles questionnaire**

Martin, et al. (2003) developed and validated Humor styles questionnaire to measure four subscales of humour styles: affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive and self-defeating humors. 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. In this study HSQ was tested for internal consistency and the following Cronbach Alpha were obtained; affiliative .76, self-enhancing .78, aggressive .72, self-defeating .75. Therefore, SHS and HSQ were found reliable and valid for use in this study.

### **Procedure**

The researcher selected five out of ten Faculties and one Department from each of the selected Faculty was used for the study. Subsequently, fifty (50) participants were incidentally selected from each of the five Departments, but only two hundred and twenty-six (226) participants completed their questionnaires properly and were used for final analysis. All the

questionnaires were administered to the consented participants at their lecture halls and were collected immediately after about 40 minutes.

### Design and Statistics

A survey research was used in the study. The design of the study was predictive correlation design which permitted the use of multiple linear regression statistics for data analysis.

### Result

Table 1: Zero Order Correlation Coefficient matrix and Coefficient Determinants of humour styles and forgiveness

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Forgiveness	1				
2. Affiliative	-.10	1			
3. Self-enhancing	.01	.24	1		
4. Aggressive	.03	.04	.14	1	
5. Self-defeating	.15*	-.10	.11	.16	1

\*  $P < .05$

Affiliative, self-enhancing and aggressive humours did not correlate significantly with forgiveness while self-defeating humour did.

Table 2: Summary Table of Multiple Learner Regression of Forgiveness Model and Humour Styles

Variables	R <sup>2</sup>	F	STD	$\beta$	T	P
	.03	1.15	6.0			
Affiliative				-.09	-1.05	.30 > .05
Self-enhancing				.01	.13	.90 > .05
Aggressive				.01	.16	.87 > .05
Self-defeating				.14	1.68	.10 > .05

The findings revealed that affiliative humour ( $\beta = -.09$ ,  $t = -.05$ ,  $P = .30$ ), self-enhancing humor ( $\beta = .01$ ,  $t = .13$ ,  $P = .90$ ), aggressive humour ( $\beta = .01$ ,  $t = .16$ ,  $P = .88$ ) and self-defeating humour ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $t = 1.68$ ,  $P = .10$ ) did not significantly predict forgiveness among undergraduates.

## **Discussion**

The main objective of this study is to find out whether humor styles: affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive and self-defeating humors will significantly predict forgiveness among undergraduates. The finding revealed that humour styles (affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive and self-defeating) humours did not significantly predict forgiveness among undergraduates.

Affiliative humor did not significantly predict forgiveness among undergraduates. This finding is not in support of Hampes (2016) finding which stated that affiliative humour correlated and predicted measures of forgiveness. This finding show that how genuinely an amusement is, may make a victim to forgive or not to forgive an offender or offenders easily. Attribution theory Heider (1958) offer some explanation to this finding. Attribution theory explains that if the cause of the amusement is from the external factors that the victim is likely to forgive the offender/offenders easily unlike when the amusement is caused by internal traits from the offender.

The finding revealed also that self-enhancing humor did not significantly predict forgiveness among undergraduates. This finding is not in support of Hampes (2016) finding which revealed that self-enhancing humour correlated and predicted forgiveness. This shows that self-enhancing humour enables one to endure stressful situations which may influence forgiveness. Heider (1958) attribution theory explains in support of this finding that stressful situations are seen as situational factors and not internal factors, which enable the victim to forgive offender easily unlike when the offender perceives the behaviour to be caused by internal factors.

Moreover, the result of this finding shows also that aggressive humour did not significantly predict forgiveness among undergraduates. This finding is not in support of Hampes (2016) researched that revealed that aggressive humour correlated and predicted two measures of forgiveness. The difference between this finding and that of Hampes (2016) may be as a result of cultural differences. Heider (1958) attribution theory assumes also that victim/victims

forgive offenders when the cause of the behavior is from the environment and not when the offender's behavior is calculated before inflicting the injury.

The finding revealed also that self-defeating humour did not significantly predict forgiveness among undergraduates. This finding is also not in support of Hampes (2016) finding which revealed that self-defeating humour significantly and negatively predicted the total forgiveness scale. Heider (1958) attribution theory explained also that internal directed behaviours are not easily forgiven like external directed behaviours.

### **Implication of the Study**

The implication of this study is that affiliative humour, self-enhancing humour, aggressive humour and self-defeating humour are not good predictors of forgiveness. This shows that humour styles do not determine forgiveness, rather what determines forgiveness is the situation on the ground. Since few research were carried out in humor styles and forgiveness in this our environment to the best of researchers knowledge, this will add new information to the existing volume of empirical work on forgiveness. Findings of the present study will provide some important information for students on some of the likely factors that may or may not predict forgiveness. This will help in maintaining peaceful co existence among undergraduates.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One of the limitations of the study is that as a survey research, students may not have responded according to how they really felt when administered the questionnaire. Thus, causality cannot be inferred from the finding and caution must be exercised in interpreting the result as relational outcomes. Moreover, data collected were only on few undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (NAU) who were willing to participate in the research, which are not the total representative of the general population of NAU, undergraduates Awka campus.

### **Suggestion for Further Study**



Further studies could however explore the constructs using longitudinal design. Only questionnaires were used in data collection. Further studies could consider triangulation methods which will allow both qualitative and quantitative data to be collected.

#### Recommendation

The researcher recommended from the findings of the study that affiliative, self-enhancing and self-defeating humour styles should not be included in university's programs as part of general studies, routine seminars, conferences and orientations of new students with respect to forgiveness. The result of the study will generate more research efforts and useful source of literature from which other studies could be initiated in the area of humor styles and forgiveness.

#### Conclusion

The present study explore whether humour styles (affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive and self-defeating) will significantly predict forgiveness among undergraduates. Evidence from the findings showed that humor styles (affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive and self-defeating) did not significantly predict forgiveness. This further confirmed the presumptions of attribution theory that victim/victims do not forgive behaviour attributed to internal factor easily, while behavior attributed to external factor will be forgiven easily.

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