Validation of the Arabic Humor Styles Questionnaire in a Community Sample of Lebanese in Lebanon

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The Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) is a measure of two potentially beneficial (affiliative and self-enhancing) and two potentially detrimental (self-defeating and aggressive) humor styles. Validation of the Arabic translation of the HSQ in the Lebanese culture, in which the self is construed as interdependent and in-group relatedness is seen as the primary determinant of well-being, indicates that four humor styles exist in the Lebanese context but that aggressive humor is less clearly distinct in this case, that self-defeating humor may be less clearly maladaptive for the interdependent self of the Lebanese, and that the four humor styles are not as strong predictors of psychological and social well-being in the Lebanese context as they are in the West. The findings suggest conceptual rethinking of humor styles in cultural contexts in which the self is construed as interdependent.

Keywords: Arabic Humor Styles Questionnaire; interdependent self-construal; psychological well-being

The Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) is a multidimensional measure of the degree to which individuals habitually engage in four different styles of humor. The development of the scale was based on a sense-of-humor model that considers humor as self- versus other-directed and as adaptive versus maladaptive, and it posits four individual difference dimensions of humor, namely, self-enhancing, self-defeating, affiliative, and aggressive humor (Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003). Self-enhancing humor involves the use of humor to regulate emotion and cope with stress and is considered adaptive because it enhances the self while maintaining respect for others. Self-defeating humor refers to excessively self-disparaging humor that, although it enhances social relationships and group cohesion, is generally maladaptive because it does so at the expense of the self. Affiliative humor is focused on sharing humorous experiences with others (family, kin, in-group, etc.) and is adaptive in that it enhances the relationship of the self with others.

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Aggressive humor involves humorous disparagement and teasing of others and, although it may be a method of coping and enhancing personal well-being in the short term, it is generally considered to be maladaptive in that it enhances the self at the expense of others.

The conceptual framework of the HSQ is informed by an individualist Western European and North American psychology lens (Allport, Freud, Maslow, etc.) that reflects the assumption of the universal construal of the self across cultures as independent, unique, and separate and the dependence of such a self on internal attributes and abilities for its well-being (Kazarian, 2007; see also Markus & Kitayama, 1991). At least four studies in North America and Belgium have supported the distinction between adaptive and maladaptive humor styles and their differential relationships with well-being and various personality correlates (Kalliny, Cruthirds, & Minor, 2006; Kuiper, Grimshaw, Leite, & Kirsh, 2004; Martin et al., 2003; Saroglou & Scariot, 2002).

Nevertheless, the independent self-construal assumption underlying the HSQ may be contested in that the self in some cultures may be construed primarily as interdependent rather than autonomous. In contrast to individualist North American culture, collectivistic cultures such as Asian, Hispanic, and Middle Eastern, in which the self is construed as interdependent, emphasize connectedness with the other and value in-group harmony, cohesion, and cooperation (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001; Dwairy, Achaoui, Abouserie, & Farah, 2006; Fernandez, Paez, & Gonzalez, 2005; Hofstede, 1980, 1991, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1998; Singelis, 1994). In such cultures, the primary determinants of well-being may be interpersonal rather than intrapersonal (Suh, 2000).

The contested assumption of the independent self-construal of the HSQ implies that the distinctions between self versus other humor and adaptive and maladaptive humor, as assessed by the HSQ, and their differential relationships to well-being may be emic or culture bound rather than etic or universal. More specifically, the varied cultural construals of the self suggest the possibility that the differentiation between self-directed humor and other-directed humor may be distinct in the individualist North American culture in which the HSQ is validated and in which the self is viewed as autonomous, but more blurred in cultures in which the self is viewed as a social appendage. Similarly, the cultural differences in self-construal raises the possibility that what may be construed as adaptive humor in a culture that views the self as independent may be seen as maladaptive in a culture that views the self as interdependent. As cultures in which the self is construed as interdependent tend to emphasize connectedness with others and value harmony, cohesion, and cooperation, a style of humor that enhances relationships at the expense of the self may be construed as adaptive rather than maladaptive, a proposition at odds with the meaning of (for example) the self-defeating humor style of the HSQ. In addition, it is possible that cultures with an independent self-construal sanction the use of humor styles that are different from those sanctioned by cultures with an interdependent self-construal. For example, cultures with an independent self-construal are more likely to endorse the use of humor that enhances the self at the expense of the other. The opposite would be expected in cultures that construe the self as interdependent, that is, enhancement of the other at the expense of the self.

Finally, it is possible that the relation of humor styles to mental health and well-being may be different in cultures that construe the self as independent rather than interdependent (Suh, 2000). As the well-being of individuals with an independent self-construal depends primarily on their personal agency, and as the use of humor represents a personality trait,
humor styles as assessed by the HSQ are likely to relate strongly to mental health. On the other hand, the use of humor is likely to be a weaker predictor of mental health in individuals who construe their self as interdependent, as the well-being of such individuals may be determined primarily by contextual and social factors, such as relatedness and the acceptance of others, rather than individual attributes and abilities.

There is suggestive evidence to contest the assumption underlying the conceptual framework of the HSQ. In the Kazarian and Martin (2004, 2006) studies, the HSQ proved somewhat problematic in that the four humor styles found in the individualist North American culture were not as distinct and internally consistent when examined in the group of Lebanese students (Kazarian & Martin, 2004) and the community group of ethnic Armenians in Lebanon (Kazarian & Martin, 2006). In fact, some of the individual humor items did not correspond to the humor style they were purported to represent. For example, Kazarian and Martin reported that the original Affiliative humor item, “I rarely make other people laugh by telling funny stories about myself;” loaded on their empirically derived self-defeating factor rather than their empirically derived Affiliative factor. Importantly, the pattern of correlations between the four humor styles in both studies were different than that found in North America. For example, both studies failed to replicate the tendency for people in North America who engage in friendly joking and laughing with their friends (affiliative humor) to make use of teasing, sarcasm, or disparaging (aggressive) forms of humor. Finally, both studies reported weaker correlations between humor styles and measures of psychological well-being than those reported in North America, raising the possibility that the humor styles assessed by the HSQ in a different cultural context may not be as strong predictors of mental health and well-being as in the individualist North American culture.

In addition to the tentativeness derived from the previous two studies in the Lebanese context, there were several limitations to the three HSQ studies previously reported in the Lebanese context (Kalliny et al., 2006; Kazarian & Martin, 2004, 2006). First, the Kalliny et al. (2006) and Kazarian and Martin (2004) studies used the English version of the HSQ on student populations, whereas the Kazarian and Martin (2006) study used the Armenian version of the scale on an ethnic minority Armenian-Lebanese group. Thus, none of the three studies were designed to provide a community sample of the Lebanese people or invoke the use of humor in the Arabic language. Kalliny et al. used a combined sample of Lebanese and Egyptians and did not report separate results for the Lebanese. An additional common limitation of the previous studies on the HSQ was that all three studies were silent on the convergent validity of the HSQ, thus leaving the independent evaluation of the distinction between adaptive and maladaptive humor uncontested.

The present study focuses on a community sample of Lebanese residing in Lebanon to evaluate their humor styles using an Arabic version of the HSQ and examining the intercorrelations of the items developed to measure those styles, to assess the convergent validity of the HSQ, and to examine the relation of the use of humor to well-being. Lebanon is a collectivist culture in which the self is construed as primarily interdependent, such that harmony and affiliation with the in-group is evoked and tajrih al karameh (hurting someone else’s pride) is avoided, and individual well-being is very much dependent on relatedness and acceptance (Hofstede, 1980, 2001; Kazarian, 2005). The pervasiveness of interdependence and relatedness in Lebanese society is evident in the cultural repression of individual agency and the social invocation of 3aib (the emotion of shame) in response to
transgressions. Examination of humor styles in a Lebanese community sample in their own language is important not only from the theoretical perspective of self-construal but also beneficial from a measurement perspective.

In the present study, we used an Arabic translation of the HSQ to examine the use of humor among Lebanese. Based on our own studies on the HSQ in Lebanon, the study of Killany et al. (2006) on Arabs, and the study of Chen and Martin (in press) on Chinese students, in addition to a review of available literature on indigenous Lebanese humor (Kazarian, in press), we expected to find the four humor styles as postulated by Martin et al. (2003) in the case of the interdependent Lebanese self. Lebanese humor scholars, notably Frayha (1962) and Lahoud (1991), had distinguished between self-directed versus other-directed humor and love-bound versus hostile-bound humor and had alluded to the possibility that some styles are more adaptive than others. Lahoud (1991), for example, had suggested that self-directed humor is of higher quality among the different uses of humor, more beneficial to the person, and more amusing to others.

In addition to the Arabic HSQ, the present study used the Coping Humor Scale (CHS; Martin & Lefcourt, 1983), a measure of humor as a coping strategy, to examine the convergent validity of the HSQ. On the basis of earlier findings in the Lebanese context, and the prohibition of hostile humor that has the potential for tajrih al karameh, we expected the CHS to be positively correlated with the two adaptive humor styles (affiliative and self-enhancing) and to a lesser extent with self-defeating humor but not with aggressive humor. This prediction is in contrast to previous findings in North American samples of the CHS, which is positively correlated with aggressive humor and unrelated to self-defeating humor (Martin et al., 2003).

Finally, we used the Arabic versions of the Center for Epidemiologic Studies–Depression Scale–Arabic (CES-D; Radloff, 1977) and the Experiences in Close Relationships–Revised Scale (ECR-R; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000) as measures of psychological and social well-being, respectively, to examine their relation to the four humor styles. Humor scholars in Lebanon have postulated that both humor and laughter are related to physical, psychological, and social well-being (Frayha, 1988; Hanin, 1979; Lahoud, 1991). Hanin (1979) suggested that humor in its various forms is capable of “lifting us from the dark ocean and melting our sorrows into hope” (p. 17). Similarly, Frayha (1988) had attributed to humor “a kind of raha [comfort] and tarakhi al3agli [mental relaxation]” (p. 21). Nevertheless, Lebanese humor scholars have been silent on the possibility that the humor function may be culture bound such that the relationship between use of humor and well-being may be different in different cultural contexts. In the present study, the correlations between the HSQ and CES-D could be compared with those found previously in the Western samples. We expected these correlations to be lower in the Lebanese context than in the more individualist West. This hypothesis was based on the assumption that the humor function is culture bound such that the use of humor is more likely to buffer the impact of negative life events in those cultures that construe the self as interdependent rather than independent, as is the case in the Lebanese context. As the HSQ is purported to be a personality-trait measure of humor, and in view of the well-being of individuals in collectivist cultures being more determined by the collective (family and kin) rather than such personality characteristics as humor, humor styles were predicted to show lower correlations with depression in the collectivist Lebanese context.
Method

Participants and Procedure

A total of 435 Lebanese residents in Lebanon (224 females, 51.7%) participated in the study. The mean age was 33.8 years (SD = 12.09, range = 11 to 80). Reported marital status was 48.4% single, 45.8% married, 2.6% divorced or separated, and 3.3% other. With regard to reported education, 2.6% had elementary or less, 11.2% technical school, 18.4% high school, 14.7% higher education, and 53.3% university level. With regard to religious affiliation, 30.8% were Christian, 56.3% Muslim, 9.8% Druze, and 3.1% other. Copies of the questionnaire battery, which included a letter of information, the Arabic versions of the instruments, and a demographic sheet were distributed to a total of 485 participants, of which 435 completed them. The snowballing method was used to gather half of the data, and the other half of the items were randomly distributed by the first author and an assistant in various settings, including schools, banks, and shops. All participants signed informed consent forms.

Measures

The HSQ, the CHS, and the CES-D were translated into Arabic using back-translation methodology. As the ECR-R had already been available in the Arabic language (Hijazi, 2004), translation of the scale was not required. The original versions of the measures were translated into Arabic by a professional translator, and the Arabic versions were then translated back to English by another professional translator, independent of the first translator. The two English versions were then compared and differences reconciled. Care was taken to ensure equivalence rather than literacy in translation.

All questionnaires were piloted on three separate occasions prior to final use. On the basis of the first two pilot studies, one of the reverse-keyed items of the Arabic CHS (Item 4), two of the reverse-keyed items of the affiliative humor scale (Items 17 and 25) and four of the reverse-keyed items of the aggressive humor items (Items 7, 15, 23, and 31) were rereversed for clearer understanding and pilot tested again. The rereversed items posed no additional problems in the third pilot study; consequently, they were used in their rereversed form in the study proper. All measures were administered to participants in randomized order to minimize potential order effects.

HSQ-Arabic (Martin et al., 2003). The HSQ is a 32-item measure comprising four 8-item scales assessing different styles of humor: affiliative (e.g., “I laugh and joke a lot with my friends’”), self-enhancing (e.g., “My humorous outlook on life keeps me from getting overly upset or depressed about things”), aggressive (e.g., “If someone makes a mistake, I will often tease them about it”), and self-defeating humor (e.g., “I often try to make people like or accept me more by saying something funny about my own weaknesses, blunders, or faults”). Respondents indicate the degree to which they agree with each item using a 7-point Likert scale. Martin et al. (2003) reported internal consistencies (Cronbach’s α) of .80 for affiliative, .81 for self-enhancing, .77 for aggressive, and .80 for self-defeating humor.
CHS-Arabic (Martin & Lefcourt, 1983). The CHS is a 7-item measure of the reported tendency to use humor in coping with life stress. The internal consistency of the CHS-Arabic scale was .71, which is very similar to that found in previous research in Western cultures.

CES-D (Radloff, 1977). The CES-D is a 20-item measure of depressive symptoms in the general population. Each item requires a rating from 1 to 4, higher scores indicating more depressive symptoms. In the present study, the internal consistency of the CES-D was .84.

ECR-R (Fraley et al., 2000). The ECR-R is a 36-item measure of anxious and avoidant styles of relating to others in the context of friendly relationships. People high on the anxious style tend to worry about whether their friends really love them and often fear rejection. People high on avoidant style feel discomfort with respect to dependence on and self-disclosure to others. Each item requires a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. A refined 26-item version of the Arabic ECR-R (Hijazi, 2004) was used in the present study. The internal consistencies (Cronbach’s α) of the social anxiety scale and the social avoidance scale were .85 and .83, respectively, and their inter-correlation was low (r = .20, p < .001).

Results

HSQ-Arabic Factor Analysis

A principal components analysis using Varimax rotation was computed on the 32 items. Examination of the scree plot indicated that a 4-factor solution was optimal. The first four factors had eigenvalues of 5.09, 3.86, 1.94, and 1.62, respectively, and accounted for 39.1% of the total variance (the next two factors had eigenvalues of 1.37 and 1.20).

An examination of the item loadings on each of the four rotated factors revealed that all eight items that loaded on the first factor corresponded to the original self-enhancing humor scale. Seven of the items that loaded on the second factor corresponded to the original self-defeating scale: the remaining item (“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”) loaded on the factor corresponding to the self-enhancing humor scale. Seven of the items that loaded on the third factor corresponded to the original affiliative humor scale; the remaining item (“I rarely make other people laugh by telling funny stories about myself”) loaded on the factor corresponding to the self-defeating humor scale. Finally, four of the items that loaded on the fourth factor corresponded to the original aggressive humor scale (“I don’t like it when people use humor as a way of criticizing or putting someone down,” “I never participate in laughing at others even if all my friends are doing it,” and “Even if something is really funny to me, I will not laugh or joke about it if someone will be offended”), to all the reverse-keyed items, and to the item, “Sometimes I think of something that is so funny that I cannot stop myself from saying it, even if it is not appropriate for the situation.” Of the remaining four original aggressive humor items, three (“If someone makes a mistake, I will often tease them about it,” “When telling jokes or saying funny things, I am usually not very concerned about how other people are taking it,” “If I don’t
like someone, I often use humor or teasing to put them down”) loaded on the factor corresponding to the self-defeating humor scale, whereas the fifth original aggressive humor item (“People are never offended or hurt by my sense of humor”) loaded on the factor corresponding to the affiliative humor scale.

Although the overall findings indicate that the theoretical structure of the HSQ found in the Western culture also exists in the Lebanese culture, there is clear indication that the Arabic HSQ scale items, particularly those that pertain to aggressive humor, require revision or conceptual rethinking.

Internal Consistencies and Intercorrelations

The internal consistencies were .67 for the affiliative humor scale, .79 for self-enhancing humor, .55 for aggressive humor, and .76 for self-defeating humor (Table 1). These reliabilities, although acceptable (with the exception of the aggressive humor scale), are somewhat lower than those reported by Martin et al. (2003) for the original English language version of the measure with Canadian samples and those reported by Saroglou and Scariot (2002) for the French translation used in Belgium.

The intercorrelations among the four HSQ-Arabic scales ranged from –.01 to .41. As with previous studies in the West and in the Arab (combined Egyptian and Lebanese), Lebanese, and Armenian-Lebanese contexts, the strongest correlations were found between the two presumed beneficial humor scales (affiliative and self-enhancing; \( r = .41, p < .001 \)) and between the two presumed detrimental humor scales (aggressive and self-defeating; \( r = .36, p < .001 \)). In addition, self-defeating humor was weak but significantly correlated with both self-enhancing (\( r = .21, p < .001 \)) and affiliative humor (\( r = .19, p < .001 \)), a finding consistent with that found in the Lebanese students (Kazarian & Martin, 2004) and the Armenian-Lebanese (Kazarian & Martin, 2006) but at variance with the Martin et al.’s (2003) finding of no correlation or weaker correlation between self-defeating humor and self-enhancing and affiliative humor. To ensure that these differences in correlations were not simply due to differences in scale reliability, the correlations were corrected for attenuation and then compared using Fisher’s \( z \)-transformation. As compared to the data reported by Martin et al. (2003), significantly higher correlations were found in the present sample between self-defeating humor and affiliative (\( z = 3.33, p < .001 \)), self-enhancing (\( z = 1.88, p = .06 \)), and aggressive humor (\( z = 5.17, p < .0001 \)).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Affiliative</th>
<th>Self-Enhancing</th>
<th>Aggressive</th>
<th>Self-Defeating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affiliative humor (AFH)</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.41***</td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td>.19***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-enhancing humor (SEH)</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.21***</td>
<td>.36***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aggressive humor (AGH)</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.36***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-defeating humor (SDH)</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.76</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001."
Finally, the correlation between affiliative and aggressive humor, although significant ($r = .10, p < .05$), was considerably weaker than that found in Western samples ($z = 4.14, p < .0001$), even after correcting for attenuation due to reliability. The pattern of correlations in this Lebanese community sample is quite similar to that found in Lebanese students (Kazarian & Martin, 2004) and the ethnic Armenian-Lebanese (Kazarian & Martin, 2006).

### Coping Humor and Humor Styles

Correlations between each of the four HSQ-Arabic scale scores and CHS Arabic scale scores are presented in Table 2. As predicted, coping humor was strongly correlated with self-enhancing ($r = .60, p < .001$), affiliative ($r = .45, p < .001$), and self-defeating humor ($r = .23, p < .001$) and uncorrelated with aggressive humor ($r = .09, ns$). Compared to the pattern of correlations reported by Martin et al. (2003), after correcting for attenuation, the correlation between CHS and self-defeating humor in the present study was significantly stronger ($z = 3.38, p < .001$), and the one with aggressive humor was marginally weaker ($z = 1.83, p = .07$).

### Depression, Attachment Styles, and Humor Styles

Correlations between each of the four HSQ-Arabic scales and CES-D Arabic scores and ECR-R Arabic (anxious and avoidant) scores are also presented in Table 2. With regard to depression, CES-D scores were negatively correlated with affiliative humor ($r = -.20, p < .001$) and self-enhancing humor ($r = -.18, p < .001$) and positively correlated with self-defeating humor ($r = .20, p < .001$) and aggressive humor ($r = .12, p < .001$). In comparison with the correlations reported by Martin et al. (2003) in Canada, after correcting for attenuation, the correlations found in the present study with the CES-D are weaker for self-enhancing humor ($z = 2.30, p < .05$), and stronger for aggressive ($z = 3.24, p = .001$), but not significantly different for affiliative or self-defeating humor.

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**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self-Affiliative</th>
<th>Self-Enhancing</th>
<th>Aggressive</th>
<th>Defeating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coping humor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CHS</td>
<td>.45***</td>
<td>.60***</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.23***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CES-D</td>
<td>-.20***</td>
<td>-.18***</td>
<td>.12**</td>
<td>.20***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attachment style</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social anxiety</td>
<td>-.23***</td>
<td>-.18***</td>
<td>.20***</td>
<td>.19***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social avoidance</td>
<td>-.10*</td>
<td>-.16**</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>.19***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: HSQ = Humor Styles Questionnaire; CHS = Coping Humor Scale; CES-D = Center for Epidemiologic Studies–Depression Scale–Arabic.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
With regard to social well-being, anxious and avoidant scores were both negatively correlated with affiliative humor ($r = - .23, p < .001$ for anxious and $r = - .10, p < .05$ for avoidant) and self-enhancing humor ($r = - .18, p < .001$ for anxious and $r = - .16, p < .01$ for avoidant) and positively correlated with self-defeating humor ($r = .19, p < .001$ for anxious and $r = .19, p < .001$ for avoidant) and aggressive humor ($r = .20, p < .001$ for anxious and $r = .11, p < .05$ for avoidant). Because the ECR-R has not been used in previous published research with the HSQ, we were unable to directly compare these results with previous studies. Nevertheless, these correlations are not only quite weak but also are lower than those typically reported in the West between the HSQ and other measures of psychosocial well-being (Martin et al., 2003).

**Discussion**

In the present study, the Arabic version of the HSQ was used in the Lebanese context to examine the universalist assumption underlying humor styles as measured by the HSQ. Except for the affiliative humor scale, the internal consistencies for the remaining humor scales in the present study were higher than those reported by Kalliny et al. (2006) for their Arab (combined Lebanese and Egyptian) sample.

Although the overall findings suggest that the theoretical structure of the HSQ found in the Western culture also exists in the Lebanese people, there is evidence of emic or culture-bound differences in the conceptual meaning and use of humor styles and their association with psychological and social well-being. More specifically, the interdependent construal of the Lebanese self as a social extension of such significant others as kin and friends, and preoccupation with harmony, dependency, and closeness, seem to invoke cultural differences in the conceptual meaning of the humor styles and may explain the inconsistencies in findings with the HSQ in the Lebanese and North American cultural contexts.

It is apparent that a number of the HSQ items have shown consistency in failing to load on their expected scales, not only in the Lebanese context but also in the Chinese context (Chen & Martin, in press), a culture in which the self is also construed as interdependent (Markus & Kitayama, 1998). Perhaps the failure of items to fall on their respective scales in the Lebanese and Chinese contexts should not be surprising considering that the HSQ items were developed with the assumption of the self as an independent rather than an interdependent agent.

In the present study, the maladaptive self-defeating item, “If I am having problems or feeling unhappy, I often cover it by joking around, so that even my closest friends don’t know how I really feel,” is interpreted as self-enhancing. Perhaps individuals with an interdependent self-construal consider exposure of their negative self to others maladaptive, as such disclosure runs the risk of diminishment in the eyes of others and even rejection. Hence, a humorous persona (joking around while wearing a mask and pretending to the other that all is well even though in reality it is not) that invokes maintenance of a favorable status and acceptance by members of the in-group is self-enhancing rather than self-defeating.

Similarly, the adaptive affiliative item, “I make other people laugh by telling funny stories about myself,” is interpreted in the Lebanese context as self-defeating humor. Individuals with an independent self-construal, who value autonomy, consider humorous
disclosure of a negative self (i.e., self-deprecating humor) conducive to interpersonal bonding in that it is likely to lead to intimacy and reciprocal self-disclosure. Individuals with an interdependent self-construal, on the other hand, tend to be preoccupied with positive self-management and acceptance from others and perhaps consider humorous self-deprecating self-disclosure maladaptive, as it diminishes them in the eyes of others and may invoke rejection rather than affiliation.

Finally, the items of the aggressive humor scale proved most problematic in the present study and in the two previous studies. In the present study, one of the aggressive humor items was interpreted by Lebanese as affiliative humor, three were interpreted as self-defeating humor, and four were interpreted as aggressive humor items. The one aggressive item that was interpreted as affiliative was a reverse-keyed item and referred to nonhurtful and nonoffensive sense of humor. Individuals with an interdependent self-construal value in-group harmony and are likely to consider nonoffensiveness and nonhurtfulness conducive to in-group affiliation and cohesion rather than aggressive.

The three aggressive humor items that were interpreted as self-defeating humor involved teasing or putting down others who are disliked or those who have made mistakes. Individuals with an interdependent self-construal value acceptance and are preoccupied by fear of rejection and abandonment such that they are more likely to consider insensitive teasing as self-defeating humor rather than aggressive in that it increases their risk for ostracism or even expulsion by the in-group.

Three of the aggressive humor items that were interpreted as aggressive by the Lebanese in this study were reverse-keyed items and involved criticism and put-down, laughing at others, and offending others. Individuals with an interdependent self-construal who are preoccupied with their own self-image, the image of others, and their in-group status may consider the humor that involves the expression of criticism of others in the in-group, offending others, and laughing at others as hostile and aggressive humor rather than the use of humor that entails teasing and situational insensitivity. The implication of this culture-bound meaning of the use of humor suggests that the reconstruction of a Lebanese aggressive humor scale requires generation of items that invoke hostile humor in the form of criticality and offense, that is, humor that touches on the highly valued karameh (pride) or sharaf (honor) of the recipient, the tajrih (hurt) of which is clearly maladaptive for a self that is relatedness- and honor-bound. Such an interpretation is consistent with the finding of a positive correlation between aggressive humor and depression, that is, the higher the use of aggressive humor, the higher the reported feelings of depression.

The correlations between the HSQ scales and the CHS suggest that, for Lebanese, self-enhancing, affiliative, and to a lesser extent self-defeating humor represent forms of humor for coping with life stress; however, in North America, aggressive humor rather than self-defeating humor is associated with the use of humor in coping. Although aggressive and self-defeating humor are generally considered to be maladaptive when overused, they may be employed by individuals to enhance their feelings of well-being at least temporarily in stressful circumstances (e.g., aggressively making fun of someone else or engaging in self-disparaging humor to cause others to laugh). These results with the CHS suggest that North Americans are more likely to use aggressive humor for this purpose, enhancing their sense of independence by making fun of others, whereas Lebanese are more likely to use self-defeating humor, enhancing their sense of interdependence by allowing others to laugh at them.
The intercorrelations of the Arabic HSQ scales also suggest an emic or culture-bound interpretation of humor. In the present study, self-defeating humor is weakly correlated with both affiliative and self-enhancing humor; however, in North American culture, aggressive humor is more correlated with affiliative and self-enhancing humor than with self-defeating humor. Thus, as hypothesized, it would appear that in Lebanese culture, relative to North Americans, there is less of a tendency for friendly joking and laughing with one’s friends (affiliative humor) to be associated with teasing and sarcastic put-down (aggressive) humor, which enhances the self at the expense of others, and a greater tendency for it to be associated with self-disparaging humor, which enhances group cohesion at the expense of the self (self-defeating). These findings are consistent with previous research in the Lebanese context (Kazarian & Martin, 2004, 2006).

The findings of the present study on the correlations between humor styles and depression suggest that the use of humor to regulate emotion and cope with adversity (self-enhancing humor) is not as strongly related to mental health and well-being among the Arabic-responding Lebanese people as it is in the individualist Canadian people. Furthermore, in Lebanese culture, use of aggressive humor is also associated with increased feelings of depression; however, in the West, it is generally unrelated to depression.

Overall, it would appear that self-defeating humor may be less clearly maladaptive in Lebanese culture than in North American culture. This form of humor, which is aimed at enhancing group cohesion at the expense of the self, may be more frequently used in Lebanon as a way of coping with life stress or adversity; however, in the North American culture, aggressive humor (teasing others to enhance the self) rather than self-defeating humor seems to represent a preferred coping function. This is consistent with Frayha’s (1962) distinction between self- and other-directed Lebanese humor and the Lebanese preference for foukaha-khalisa (humor that springs from love) over foukaha ta3addi (humor that is hostile, aggressive, and rejecting).

Finally, the findings of the present study, although correlational, indicate that humor styles are poorer predictors of mental health and social functioning in the Lebanese context than in the Canadian context. Although the consistent finding of a weak relationship between humor functions and physical, psychological, and social well-being obtained in the three studies conducted in Lebanon may be due to measurement limitations, the findings may also be emic or due to culture. Although the use of humor, a personality trait, invokes a sense of well-being among individuals with an independent self-construal, it may not serve this positive function to the same degree for individuals with an interdependent self-construal. In fact, in the use of aggressive humor, it seems to have an adverse association with mental health.

The findings of the present study suggest that some of the items of the HSQ and its aggressive scale require rethinking, and consideration needs to be given to the generation of new items that are informed by an interdependent construal of the self. The reconstructed Arabic HSQ should also be examined in relation to sociodemographic factors, such as gender, and direct measures of self-construal and social determinants of well-being.

The findings of the present study are limited to a convenience sample of Lebanese with a broad sociodemographic representation but not broad enough to be representative of the entire Lebanese population. In addition, the present study relied exclusively on self-report measures in the Arabic language, and future research should make use of other sources of
data, such as in-depth interviews, behavioral observations, and peer ratings. Finally, the assumption that the differences found between Western and Lebanese participants are due to differences in independent versus interdependent self-construal needs to be investigated further by determining whether similar patterns of results are also found in other non-Western, interdependent cultures.

References


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