

## Humor Styles and Socio-Demographic Variables as Predictors of Subjective Well-Being of Turkish University Students

### Türk Üniversite Öğrencilerinde Öznel İyi Oluşu Yordayan Sosyodemografik Değişkenler ve Mizah Tarzları

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#### Öz

Bu araştırmanın temel amacı, üniversite öğrencilerinin sosyodemografik özellikleri ile mizah tarzları ve öznel iyi oluşları arasındaki ilişkinin incelenmesidir. Araştırmaya Çukurova Üniversitesi'nin değişik fakültelerinden 376 öğrenci katılmıştır. Veriler, Olumlu ve Olumsuz Duygular, Yaşam Doyumu, Mizah Tarzları Ölçekleri ve Sosyodemografik Bilgi Formu ile elde edilmiştir. Analizlerde t-testi, korelasyon ve adımli regresyon kullanılmıştır. Toplam öznel iyi oluş, saldırgan ve kendini yıkıcı mizah tarzlarında erkek öğrencilerin puanları, kızlardan anlamlı bir şekilde yüksek çıkmıştır. Olumsuz duygularda, kız öğrencilerin puanları erkek öğrencilerden anlamlı bir şekilde yüksek bulunmuştur. Olumlu duygular, yaşam doyumu, katılımcı mizah ve kendini geliştirici mizah değişkenleri açısından ise kız ve erkek öğrenciler arasında anlamlı bir fark bulunmamıştır. Regresyon analizi sonucunda, kendini geliştirici mizah, saldırgan mizah, romantik ilişki, cinsiyet ve sosyoekonomik statünün toplam öznel iyi oluşu yordamada önemli olduğu anlaşılmıştır.

*Anahtar Sözcükler:* Öznel iyi oluş, mizah tarzları, cinsiyet, üniversite öğrencileri.

#### Abstract

This study investigated the relationship among socio-demographic variables and humor styles on university students' subjective well-being (SWB). Participants were 376 university students attending different faculties at Çukurova University. Positive and Negative Affect, Satisfaction with Life, Humor Styles Questionnaires, and Socio-Demographic Information Questionnaire were used to collect data. To analyze the data, t-test, correlation, and stepwise regression analyses were employed. Aggregate SWB, Aggressive and self-defeating humor of male students were found to be significantly higher than those of female students. However, negative affect female students were significantly higher than those of male students. No significant difference between male and female students with respect to life satisfaction, positive affect, affiliative and self-enhancing humor was detected. Results of regression analyses indicated that self-enhancing humor, aggressive humor, romantic relationship, gender and economic status predict of aggregate SWB.

*Keywords:* Subjective well-being, humor styles, gender, university students

#### Introduction

Subjective well-being (SWB) is a field of psychology aiming to understand people's evaluations of their own happiness. Such evaluations may primarily be cognitive or emotional. Whereas the cognitive aspect usually implies overall life satisfaction, the emotional aspect usually implies the balance between positive and negative affect (Diener, 1998; Rask, Astedt-Kurki & Laippala, 2002). Individuals can be said to have high SWB if they are satisfied with their lives and

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they often feel happy. The cognitive and emotional components of SWB are highly interrelated. For general reviews of the term SWB, see Kahneman, Diener and Schwarz (1999), Veenhoven (2000).

Lyubomirsky (2001: 239) argues that "in order to understand why some people are happier than others, one must understand the cognitive and motivational processes that serve to maintain, and even enhance, enduring happiness and transient mood". Enduring happiness may be defined as global happiness while transient moods are happy or unhappy moments. Global happiness and transient moods are related and they are both important in determining an individual's SWB. The previous studies provide support for relation between psychological well-being and certain styles of humor (Kuiper & Martin, 1998a; Nezlek & Derks, 2001).

The 20<sup>th</sup> century observed a growing interest in the study of individual differences in humor (Martin, 1998; Martin, 2007). In the early 1980s, much of this research focused on potential positive effects of humor on physical and psychosocial health and well-being (Lefcourt, 2001; Martin, 2001).

In contemporary psychology, the term "sense of humor" refers to humor as an enduring personality trait (Ruch, 1998). There is little consensus about how to define and measure sense of humor as a trait, however, and researchers use the term in many different ways (Martin, 1998). Thus, sense of humor may be conceptualized as an habitual behavior pattern (tendency to laugh frequently, to tell jokes and amuse others, to laugh at other people's jokes), an ability (ability to create humor, to amuse others, to "get the joke," to remember jokes), a temperamental trait (habitual cheerfulness), an aesthetic response (enjoyment of particular types of humorous material), an attitude (positive attitude toward humor and humorous people), a world view (bemused outlook on life), or a coping strategy (tendency to maintain a humorous perspective in the face of adversity). These various definitions of sense of humor may not be highly intercorrelated (indeed, some may even be inversely related), and not all are likely to be relevant to positive psychology. One of the challenges of research on humor in the context of positive psychology is to identify which aspects or components of the humor construct are most relevant to mental health and successful adaptation.

Several studies suggest that people with a greater sense of humor have a more positive self-concept, a higher level of self-esteem, fewer dysfunctional self-evaluative standards, and lower levels of perceived stress, anxiety, and depression (Kuiper & Martin, 1998a; Nezlek & Derks, 2001). Those with a greater sense of humor have also been found to experience greater pleasure from the various social roles they assume (Kuiper, Martin & Dance, 1992; Kuiper, McKenzie & Belanger, 1995; Nezlek & Derks, 2001). On the other hand, not all research supports the hypothesis that there is a positive correlation between psychological well-being and humor. For instance, Kuiper and Martin (1998b) found in a community study that those with higher levels of daily laughter did not necessarily display greater positive affect. Similarly, Nezlek and Derks (2001) concluded that greater humor does not always lead to higher levels of intimacy in interpersonal relationships or always relate to higher levels of optimism, self-acceptance, or environmental mastery (Kuiper & Martin, 1998a).

Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray and Weir (2003) investigated styles of adaptive and maladaptive humor. As a result, they found two adaptive styles known as self-enhancing and affiliative humor. Self-enhancing humor includes a self focus and denotes a humorous outlook on life which can be maintained even at times of stress. Affiliative humor, on the other hand, focuses on the other and uses humor to improve interpersonal and social relationships. A person with high amounts of affiliative humor then uses it to raise group morale, identity, and cohesiveness, while at the same time avoiding conflicts.

However, the two maladaptive styles are potentially detrimental to either self (self-defeating humor) or others (aggressive humor). To illustrate, self-defeating humor entails excessive and inappropriate self-disparaging humor to gain the approval of others. Martin et. al. (2003), have

suggested that such individuals generally use this style to hide underlying negative feelings or avoid dealing constructively with a problem. The other maladaptive style, aggressive humor, entails the use of a variety of negative humor techniques, including ridicule, sarcasm and belittling to degrade others (Kuiper, Grimshaw, Leite & Kirsh, 2004).

Although previous studies provide support for the protective function of humor in general, psychological well-being may in fact be related only to certain styles of humor. For example, while one's ability to joke, tell amusing stories and keep a humorous outlook on life may serve as a protective role against psychopathology, other styles such as sarcasm, ridicule, or self-disparaging humor may be hazardous to psychological well-being (Martin et al., 2003). In a recent cross-sectional examination of the differential impact of specific humor styles on psychological well-being, Kuiper et al. (2004) report that the two adaptive styles of humor, namely affiliative and self-enhancing humor, were negatively associated with depression, whereas self-focused maladaptive humor, namely self-defeating humor, was positively correlated with depression. The other maladaptive style of humor which focuses negatively on others, namely aggressive humor, was found to be unrelated to personal well-being.

The gender variable is related to humor as well as subjective well-being. That there are differences in the meaning of humor for males and females is supported in the humor literature (Crawford & Gressley, 1991; Henkin & Fish, 1986). Female humor more often is said to be self-directed and story like, whereas male humor is more often in the form of wit or joke telling that contains attacks upon those for whom the joker has disdain. Female humor, then, may invite sharing or social cohesion, whereas male humor may commonly serve competitive purposes. Therefore, positive effects of humor are pronounced more within female than male samples.

Previous studies on gender difference of life satisfaction have produced quite confusing results. On the one hand, studies on positive well-being found that women reported greater happiness and life satisfaction than men (Wood, Rhodes & Whelan, 1989). A meta-analysis (Haring, Stock & Okun, 1984) indicated that men were slightly happier than women, but the difference was very small. On the other hand, studies on negative affect and psychological symptomatology found that women had more emotional problems (Fujita, Diener & Sandvik, 1991). Some researchers (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985; Wood, Rhodes & Whelan, 1989) proposed that positive affect and negative affect are uncorrelated. Although women report more negative emotions than men, they also report more positive ones. On balance, therefore, the predominant finding is that there are no sex differences. The present study tries to confirm the previous findings regarding relationship among gender, humor styles, and subjective well-being within Turkey's situation.

Recent studies also indicate the nature of the relation between age and subjective well-being. Diener and Suh (1998) reported that life satisfaction and negative emotions show no significant relationship with age whereas positive emotions demonstrate weak negative age differences. The finding of relative age stability also holds true when longitudinal data are considered.

When no effect of age on life satisfaction indicators was found in the study by Zhang and Leung (1999), the authors speculated that the effect might be due to the small age range of the participants (12–29). Recent studies indicate that life satisfaction often increases, or at least does not drop, with age (Horley & Lavery, 1995; Stock, Okun, Haring & Witter, 1983). Cross-cultural studies based on representative samples from multiple countries also show that life satisfaction does not decline with age (Butt & Beiser, 1987; Ingelhart, 1990). In a more recent study with national probability samples of almost 60,000 adults from 40 nations, Diener and Suh (1998) found that there was a slight upward trend in life satisfaction from people in their 20s to those in their 80s.

Socio-Economic Status (SES) is another related variable to subjective well-being. SES demonstrates relatively stronger well-being gradients (associations) than age and gender.

Perhaps the strongest socio structural predictors of well-being are income and social status. The effects of income on SWB are not simple and linear. Some of the positive effects of income might be cancelled by rising material desires, or perhaps by stressors such as longer work hours and higher expectations for achievement (Diener & Scollon, 2003).

The positive effects of romantic experiences in adolescence may spill over into other domains in the life course, impacting mental health, development of a positive self image and subjective well being. The effects of adolescent romantic and sexual involvement may not be all positive. Romantic and sexual involvement during adolescence is also associated with elevated risks of depression and poorer self esteem (Brendgen, Vitaro, Doyle, Markiewicz & Bukowski, 2002; Davila, Steinberg, Kachadourian, Cobb & Fincham, 2004; Joyner & Udry, 2000; Welsh, Grello & Harper, 2003). Dissolving romantic relationships is particularly hazardous for adolescents' well being. Romantic and sexual involvement during adolescence can also take a toll on individuals' well being. Whether adolescent romantic and sexual involvement has positive or negative consequences on well being throughout the life course may depend on the characteristics of the relationships.

The present study aims to (1) determine the SWB and humor styles of university students, and whether or not the SWB and humor styles differ significantly according to gender, and (2) examine if university students' gender, age, socio-economic status, romantic relationships and humor styles can predict their aggregate SWB.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were 376 university students attending different faculties at Çukurova University, 376 students volunteered to participate in this study, 211(56.1%) of whom were female, and 165 of whom (43.9%) were male.

Regarding SES, it has been reported that 112 (29.8%) students come from lower SES, 174 (46.3%) middle, and 90 (23.9%) from upper SES. While 136 (36.2%) students indicated that they had a romantic relationship, 240 (63.8%) indicated they did not have such a relationship. The mean age of the participants was 21.15 years ranging from 18 to 26.

### *Measures*

*Subjective Well-Being (SWB)* All participants rated the 20 mood adjectives of the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (Watson, Tellegen & Clark, 1988), indicating how much they have felt each emotion "in the past month or so". A Likert-type scale from 1 (*very slightly or not all*) to 5 (*extremely*) was employed, and positive affect and negative affect scores were derived by averaging the appropriate items. It was found that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient scores for positive affect was .88, for negative affect was .85, in the original scale. The test-retest correlation coefficients of PANAS applied in two week intervals were .47 for both positive and negative affect. In the adaptation of PANAS to Turkish (Gençöz, 2000), it was found that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient scores for positive affect was .86, for negative affect was .83. The test-retest correlation coefficients of PANAS applied in three week intervals were, for positive affect .54, for negative affect .40. In this study, the reliability of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient scores for positive affect was .84, for negative affect was .82.

Participants also completed the five items of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985), with reference to the past month or so, using a Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). These items were averaged to create a life-satisfaction score. In the adaptation of Life Satisfaction to Turkish (Köker, 1991), it was found that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient score of Life Satisfaction was .75. The test-retest correlation coefficients of Life Satisfaction scale applied in three week intervals was .85. In this study, the reliability of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient

score of Life Satisfaction was .74.

As in other recent studies (Bettencourt & Sheldon, 2001; Elliot, Sheldon & Church, 1997; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999), in this study also computed an aggregate measure of SWB by first standardizing all scores and then subtracting negative affect from the sum of positive affect and life satisfaction (Diener, 1994).

*Humor Styles Questionnaire* (HSQ; Martin et al., 2003) is a 32-item self-report measure assessing four dimensions related to individual differences in uses of humor in everyday life. Respondents rate each item using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree). The HSQ contains 8-item subscales measuring each of the four dimensions of humor (affiliative, self-enhancing, self-defeating, and aggressive). The four humor styles, along with sample items are affiliative: (e.g., 'I laugh and joke a lot with my close friends'); self-enhancing (e.g., 'Even when I'm by myself, I am often amused by the absurdities of life'); aggressive (e.g., 'If someone makes a mistake, I will often tease them about it'); and self-defeating (e.g., 'I will often get carried away in putting myself down if it makes my family or friends laugh'). Martin et al. (2003) reported internal consistencies (the Cronbach's alpha) of .80 for affiliative, .81 for self-enhancing, .77 for aggressive, and .80 for self-defeating humor.

In the adaptation of HSQ to Turkish (Yerlikaya, 2003), it was found that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient scores of HSQ were .74 for affiliative humor .78 for self-enhancing humor .69 for aggressive humor and .67 for self-defeating humor. The test-retest correlation coefficients of HSQ scale applied in two week intervals were, .88 for affiliative humor, .82 for self enhancing humor, .85 for aggressive humor, and .85 for self defeating humor.

In this study, the reliability of the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of HSQ dimensions were .76 for affiliative humor .75 for self-enhancing humor .71 for aggressive humor and .69 for self-defeating humor.

*Socio-Demographic Information Questionnaire*. The questionnaire was developed for this study by the researcher. It is designed to describe the student's demographic information, such as gender, age, socio-economic status, and romantic relationship. Its main aim was to determine the predictors for aggregate SWB.

#### *Procedure*

The research was conducted in the spring term of the 2008- 2009 academic year. The SPSS 11.5 package was used in the analysis of the data. During the analysis, descriptive statistics, independent-samples *t*-test, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient and stepwise regression calculations were carried out, and  $p < .05$  was taken as the critical level of significance. For stepwise regression gender was coded 0=female, 1=male; romantic relationship was coded 0=no, 1=yes. Since socio-economic status is a categorical variable, it was coded as dummy variables.

### Results

The SBW and humor styles of university students were compared with respect to gender by *t*-test. A summary of statistics and their significances are given in Table 1.



Table 1.

*Comparison of Subjective Well-Being and Humor Styles of Students With Respect to Gender*

Dependent variable	Gender	N	M	SD	t
Aggregate SWB	Female	211	-.16	2.07	-1.891*
	Male	165	.21	1.73	
Life satisfaction	Female	211	20.88	9.14	-1.584
	Male	165	22.34	8.70	
Positive affect	Female	211	33.62	9.17	-.906
	Male	165	34.46	8.80	
Negative affect	Female	211	21.22	10.18	1.125*
	Male	165	20.16	8.07	
Affiliative humor	Female	211	39.80	8.78	-.127
	Male	165	39.91	9.13	
Self enhancing humor	Female	211	35.63	9.09	1.054
	Male	165	34.65	8.85	
Aggressive humor	Female	211	18.61	6.90	-2.566*
	Male	165	20.70	8.47	
Self defeating humor	Female	211	18.76	7.51	-3.519**
	Male	165	21.92	9.42	

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .0001$

As shown in Table 1, aggregate SWB of male students was found to be higher than aggregate SWB of female students, with a significance level of .05. Additionally, the negative affect of female students was significantly higher than those of male students, with a significance level of .05. Aggressive ( $t = -2.566; p < .05$ ) and self-defeating humor ( $t = -3.519; p < .0001$ ) of male students were found to be significantly higher than those of females. No significant difference between male and female students with respect to life satisfaction, positive affect, affiliative humor and self-enhancing humor was detected.

The researcher made also an attempt to examine whether or not the variables of gender, age, socio-economic status, romantic relationships, affiliative humor, self-enhancing humor, aggressive humor and self-defeating humor predict aggregate SWB. To this end, Pearson Correlation Coefficients between aggregate SWB and selected continuous variables were computed first to check if there were communality among variables. The results are given in Table 2.

Table 2.

*Pearson Intercorrelations of Variables (N= 376)*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1-Aggregate SWB	-								
2-Affiliative	.41**	-							
3-Self Enhancing	.59**	.49**	-						
4-Aggressive	-.37**	-.12*	.01	-					
5-Self Defeating	-.05	.03	.08	.31**	-				
6-Gender	.09	.01	-.05	.13**	.18**	-			
7-Age	.08	.09	.09	.02	-.03	.00	-		
8-Socio-economic status	.09	.12*	.12*	-.01	-.10*	.07	.35**	-	
9-Romantic relationship	.39**	.16**	.09	-.05	.08	.02	.09	.17**	-

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

The inter-correlations among the nine variables ranged from -0.37 to 0.59. Affiliative humor was positively correlated with aggregate SWB ( $r = .41; p < .01$ ). Self-enhancing humor significantly positively correlated with aggregate SWB ( $r = .59; p < .01$ ) and affiliative humor ( $r = .49; p < .01$ ). Aggressive humor was negatively correlated with aggregate SWB ( $r = -.37; p < .01$ ) as well as with

affiliative humor ( $r = -.12; p < .05$ ). The positive correlation between self-defeating humor and aggressive humor among of university students ( $r = .31; p < .01$ ). Gender was significantly positively correlated with aggressive humor ( $r = .13; p < .01$ ) and self-defeating humor ( $r = .18; p < .01$ ). Romantic relationship was positively correlated with aggregate SWB ( $r = .39; p < .01$ ), affiliative humor ( $r = .16; p < .01$ ) and socio-economic status ( $r = .17; p < .01$ ). In addition, socio-economic status was positively correlated with affiliative humor ( $r = .12; p < .05$ ), self-enhancing humor ( $r = .12; p < .05$ ), age ( $r = .35; p < .01$ ) and it was significantly weakly negatively correlated with self-defeating humor ( $r = -.10; p < .05$ ).

It was also observed that the strongest relationship appeared to be between aggregate SWB and affiliative humor, self-enhancing humor, aggressive humor styles of university students. After this analysis, predictive values of affiliative humor, self-enhancing humor, aggressive humor, gender, socio-economic status, romantic relationship, were assessed by the stepwise method of multiple regression analysis. The results are given in Table 3.

Table 3.

*Stepwise Regression Analysis Results in the Prediction of University Students' Aggregate Subjective Well-Being*

Variables	$\beta$	<i>t</i> -score	$\Delta R^2$	<i>p</i>
<b>Step 1</b> ( $\Delta F = 200.4; p < .0001; R^2 = .35$ )				
Self enhancing humor	.59	14.2	.35	.0001
<b>Step 2</b> ( $\Delta F = 103.1; p < .0001; R^2 = .49$ )				
Self enhancing humor	.59	16.1		.0001
Aggressive humor	-.38	-10.2	.14	.0001
<b>Step 3</b> ( $\Delta F = 90.5; p < .0001; R^2 = .59$ )				
Self enhancing humor	.56	16.9		.0001
Aggressive humor	-.36	-10.8		.0001
Romantic relationship	.32	9.5	.10	.0001
<b>Step 4</b> ( $\Delta F = 28.1; p < .0001; R^2 = .62$ )				
Self enhancing humor	.57	17.8		.0001
Aggressive humor	-.38	-11.8		.0001
Romantic relationship	.31	9.7		.0001
Gender	.17	5.3	.03	.0001
<b>Step 5</b> ( $\Delta F = 5.4; p < .001; R^2 = .63$ )				
Self enhancing humor	.58	18.0		.0001
Aggressive humor	-.39	-12.0		.0001
Romantic relationship	.33	10.0		.0001
Gender	.18	5.5		.0001
Socio-economic status	-.08	-2.3	.01	.001

Data from Table 3 shows that self-enhancing humor, aggressive humor, romantic relationship, gender and economic status were found to be significant predictors of aggregate SWB. These five variables explain 63% of the total variance. Self-enhancing humor itself explains 35% ( $R^2 = .35$ ) the total of variance, so it is the strongest predictor of aggregate SWB. Aggressive humor appeared to be the second predictor of aggregate SWB, and explains 14% of the total variance ( $R^2 = .49$ ). And the third ranked variable, romantic relationships, explains 10% of the total variance ( $R^2 = .59$ ). The

other variables were gender and socio-economic status. On the other hand age, affiliative humor and self-defeating humor were not found to predict aggregate SWB significantly.

## Discussion

### *Relationship between Gender and SWB*

According to the findings, aggregate SWB of male students were significantly higher than aggregate SWB of female students. No significant difference between male and female students with respect to life satisfaction and positive affect was detected. The average points of negative affect for female students are significantly higher than those of male students. These findings corroborate those of Lucas and Gohm (2000), and Cenkseven (2004).

Previous research findings about gender and SWB reveal that although men and women report similar levels of global happiness, women experience more negative affect and depression than men and they are more likely to seek therapy. Thus, it is possible that both sexes experience similar levels of negative affect and depression, but women report these feelings more often and seek professional help. Another possible reason has been offered by Fujita, Diener and Sandvik (1991) who found that women report greater amounts of both positive and negative affect. They suggest that women, as nurturers, are taught to be more open to positive and negative emotional experiences, and thus they themselves experience stronger positive and negative affect. They also discovered that gender was responsible for less than 1% of the variance in happiness but over 13% of the variance in the intensity of emotional experiences. Similarly, Fujita, Diener and Sandvik (1991) contend that women's openness to intense emotional experiences creates a vulnerability to depression on the one hand, but creates opportunity for intense levels of happiness as well, on the other hand. However, in the present study we found that the females had greater negative affect, but that males and females did not differ on positive affect.

### *Relationship between Gender and Humor Styles*

In this study, the findings show that males scored higher than females on Aggressive and Self-defeating humor. Previous studies have also shown that males report more use of aggressive and self-defeating humor than do females. The greater tendency of males to engage in these presumably harmful styles of humor is consistent with previous evidence that men engage in more potentially maladaptive forms of humor than do women (Crawford & Gressley, 1991; Kazarian & Martin, 2004; Lefcourt, Davidson, Prkachin & Mills, 1997; Martin & Kuiper, 1999; Saroglou & Scariot, 2002; Sarı & Aslan, 2005; Yerlikaya, 2007).

Early studies of gender and humor focused on male and female preferences in the joke content. Researchers agreed that women preferred less aggressive, less sexual, and more neutral and absurd jokes than men did (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1998; Nevo, 1984). A consistent finding has been that men score higher on humor creation, whereas women score higher on humor appreciation. Women initiate less humor, especially sexual and aggressive humor, but laugh and appreciate jokes more than men do (Neitz, 1980). As aggressiveness is not an approved behavior for girls in Turkish societies it can be said that it is not common for girls to use humor in a detrimental way neither for others nor for themselves.

One explanation for these gender differences may be that the use of humor among males, as compared to females, has more to do with issues relating to one's status. Aggressive humor may be seen as a way of attempting to enhance and assert one's status at the expense of others, whereas Self-Defeating humor may be an alternative strategy for enhancing one's status by ingratiating oneself with others by amusing them at one's own expense. It is quite common for males in Turkey to use self-defeating humor as a way to make themselves accepted within the group. In Turkish culture, this behavior is interpreted as a positive and constructive mechanism. Naturally, these hypotheses require further investigation. There are different explanations about



the purpose of using self-defeating humor. For example, Kubie (1971) pointed out that using humor as a defensive mechanism is a way to hide negative emotions or to avoid coping with problems constructively (cited in Martin et al., 2003).

No significant difference between male and female students with respect to affiliative humor and self-enhancing humor was detected. Consistent with the present study results, Kazarian and Martin (2004), found no gender differences in affiliative or self-enhancing humor.

Gender differences in humor content and styles have mainly been linked to gender role socialization. Further research is needed to examine whether these differences do indeed result from socio-cultural influences or are innate.

#### *The Prediction of SWB*

Stepwise regression analysis in the present study proved that self-enhancing humor, aggressive humor, romantic relationships, gender and socio-economic status were significant predictors for aggregate SWB. The researchers investigated the predictor variables of aggregate SWB as well, and self-enhancing humor was found to be the strongest predictor of aggregate SWB. Aggressive humor was found to be the second predictor, which accounts for 14% of the total variance. Consistent with the findings of Martin et al. (2003), the present study revealed a positive relationship between self-enhancing and SWB.

According to the results, romantic relationships were the third predictor of aggregate SWB, and they explain 10% of the total variance. Likewise, Diener and Fujita (1995) found that strong romantic relationships are associated with positive affect and life satisfaction. Different ways of interaction such as sincerity, sharing, engaging in mutually enjoyable activities, or avoiding conflict contribute to people's feelings of association with each other (Di Dio, 2003). Good relationships help people overcome sadness, recover from illnesses and experience better mental and emotional health. This is known as the "tampon" effect. Many previous studies, as well as the present one, have shown that social relationships are one of the most important sources of happiness (Diener, 1984; Myers & Diener, 1995).

Gender, the fourth predictor of aggregate SWB, explains 3% of the total variance. While some previous studies have concluded that women report higher SWB than men (Diener et al., 1985; Shmotkin, 1990; White, 1992; Wood, Rhodes & Whelan, 1989), others have claimed that men report higher SWB (Broady & Hall, 1993; Haring et al., 1984; Lucas & Gohm, 2000). Additionally, some studies have reached the conclusion that there is little difference between men's and women's SWB (Cheng & Furnham, 2003; Goodstein, Zautra & Goodhart, 1982). Gender differences in SWB seem to be little, if not nonexistent, particularly in Western countries. In the World Value Survey (Inglehart, 1990), approximately 170,000 representatively sampled respondents from 16 different countries were examined and the differences in SWB between men and women were found to be very small. By the same token, Michalos (1991) studied 18,000 college students in over 30 countries and found very small gender differences in life satisfaction and happiness. The present study found that gender is a predictor of SWB, albeit a small one. This is in line with other research findings mentioned above.

Socio-economic status, the fifth predictor of aggregate SWB, explains 1% of the total variance. As income allows people to achieve their aims, it is an important predictor of SWB. While an increase in income also increases people's level of happiness by giving them more opportunities, at the same time it decreases their levels of happiness by causing a decline in their previously happy relationships (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). Placing monetary values at the center of one's life displays a negative correlation with individual well-being and emotional health (Kasser & Ryan, 1993).

There are many studies which report a positive relationship between socio-economic status and SWB (Diener, Sandvik, Seidlitz & Diener, 1993; Dirksen, 1990; Haring et al., 1984; Tuzgöl Dost, 2006). Veenhoven (1991) found that money predicts satisfaction most strongly in poorer societies, and Diener and Diener (1993) found that financial satisfaction predicts life satisfaction better in underprivileged countries. However, other studies have shown socio-economic status to contribute very little to SWB

(Diener & Fujita, 1995; Diener et al., 1999; Suh, Diener & Fujita, 1996). Similarly, the present study found that socio-economic status is a minor contributor to SWB. The results have shown that socio-economic status is necessary for SWB but not enough on its own.

### Conclusion

The conditions causing aggregate SWB among Turkish university students show striking partly similarities with those in other countries. Self-enhancing humor, aggressive humor, romantic relationships, gender and socio-economic status play an important role in aggregate SWB of university students. It was also observed that the strongest relationship is the one between aggregate SWB and the humor styles of university students. Humor is therefore the most powerful variable as a predictor of aggregate SWB.

Further research is needed to examine whether these differences do indeed result from socio-cultural influences. It will be important for future research to replicate these findings using multiple measures of SWB (i.e., personality, optimism, social support, self-esteem). Therefore, replications of these findings on a larger sample and with different well-being measures are recommended. More research on the Turkish university students are also needed to achieve a clear picture about subjective well-being and humor styles in terms their relation to demographic factors. Since the research is based on the data obtained from self-report scales, in interpreting the results, the limits of the instruments used should be considered. In a further study, qualitative techniques such as interview could be used to elicit more detailed information.

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