



Humor and Happiness Among People With Multiple Sclerosis

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Abstract

The proposed research consisted of one study that examined the relationship between humor styles and happiness among people with a chronic illness, specifically Multiple Sclerosis (MS). In this study, we used correlational methods to test the hypothesis that a self-enhancing humor style relates positively to happiness and negatively to anxiety. That is, to the extent people habitually use self-enhancing humor to joke about their illness, they should report being generally happier and less anxious. We distributed a survey comprised of four measures to assess participant's levels of happiness, anxiety, perceived stress in their daily lives, and the degree to which they used self-enhancing humor. Our findings supported the hypothesis that people who have Multiple Sclerosis and a self-enhancing humor style tend to be happier and less anxious because they perceive less stress in their daily lives.

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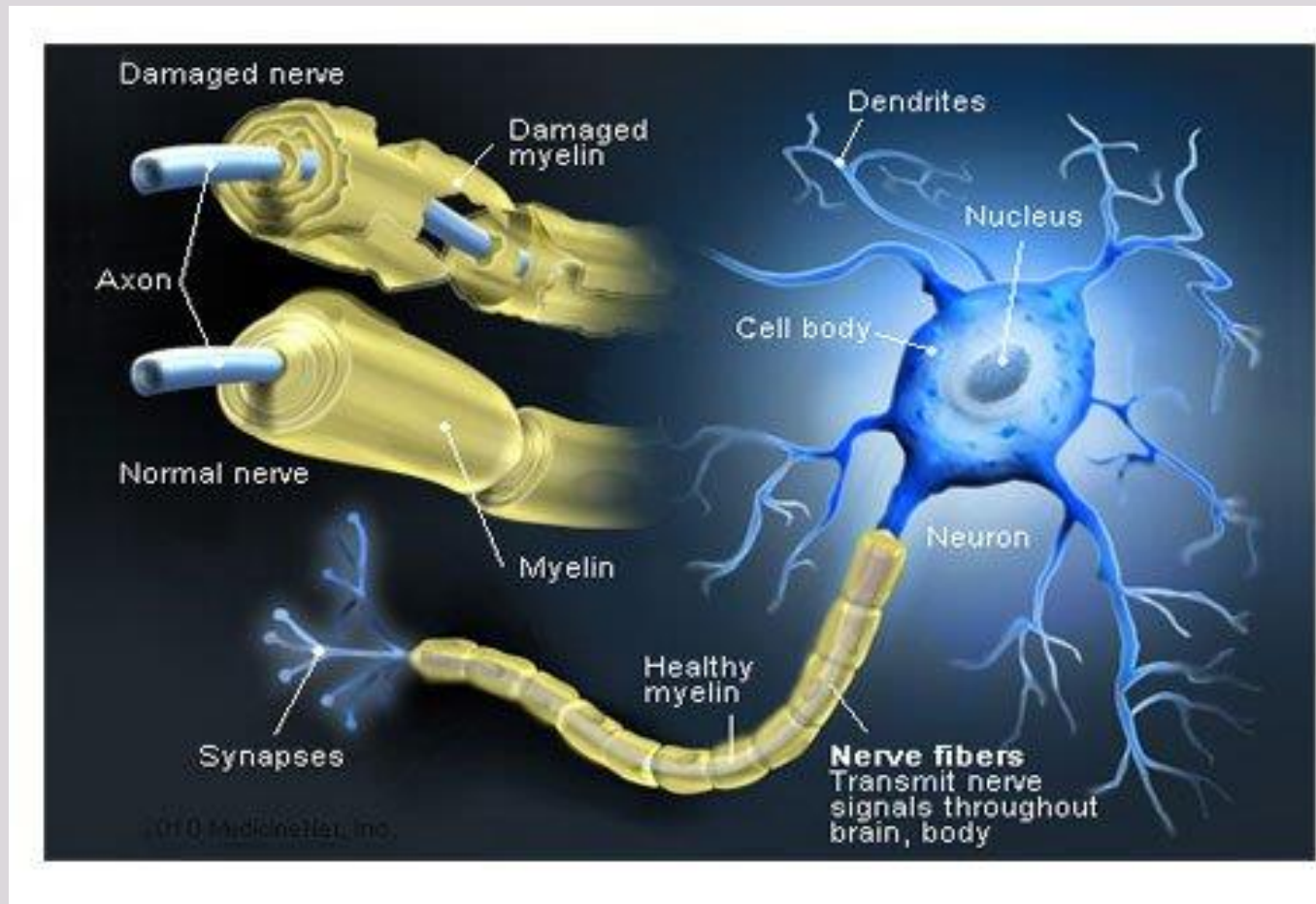
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HUMOR AND HAPPINESS AMONG PEOPLE WITH MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Audre Tyner &
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Multiple Sclerosis



- Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is a chronic autoimmune disease that affects the body's central nervous system.
- Approximately 2 million people are affected worldwide
 - *Approximately 1 million in the US alone*

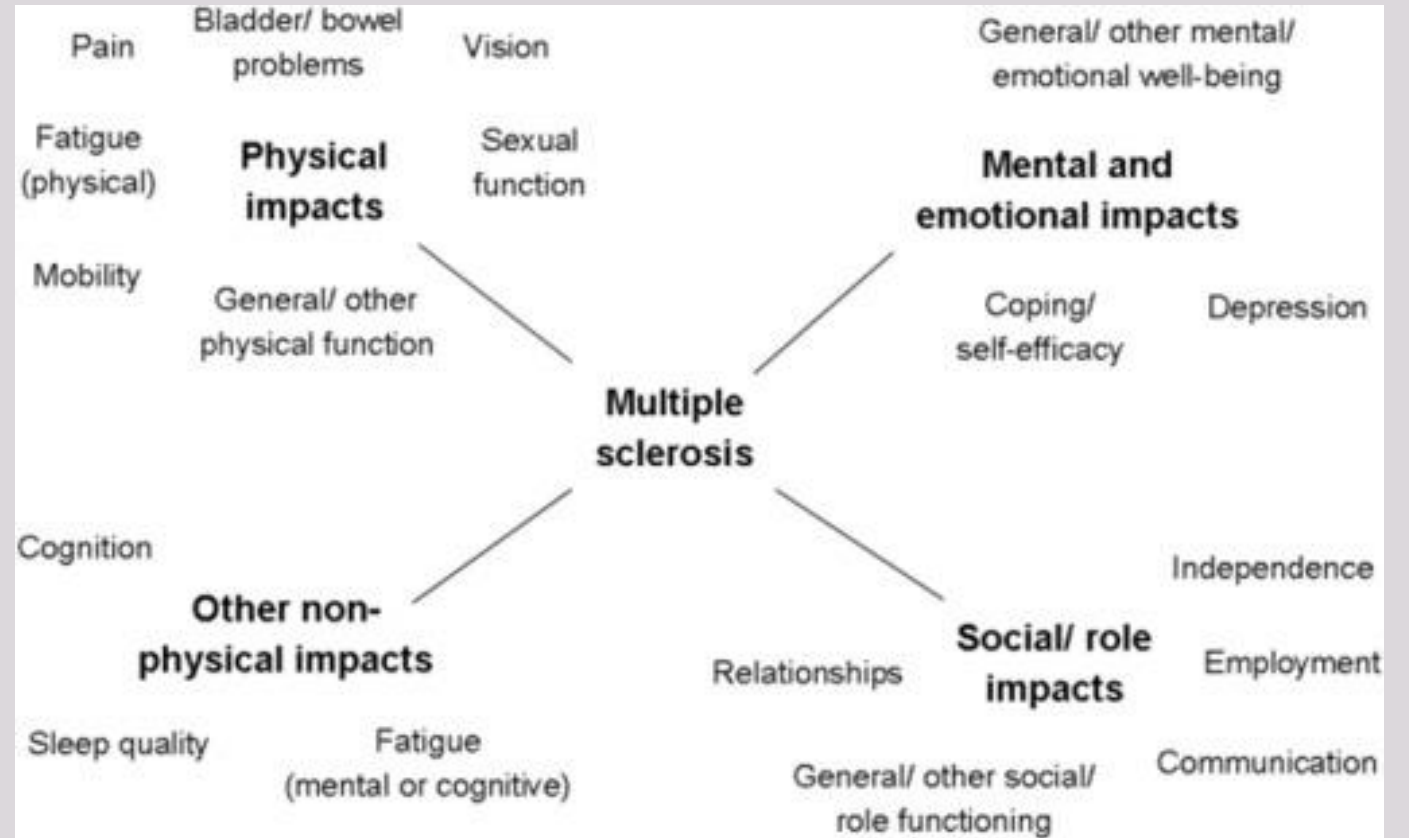
Physical Symptoms

- Ranges in severity and form:
 - *Vision problems*
 - Blurry vision to double vision
 - *Impaired mobility*
 - Loss of independence that affects overall QoL
 - *Communication challenges*
 - Lack of intelligibility
 - Stuttering
 - Loss of control coordinating breathing



Psychological Stressors

- Increased anxiety
- Decreased happiness



Central Questions

- How do people cope with stressors of MS?
- Why do some people seem to cope better than others?
- Do some people carry with them something in their psychology that **buffers** them from the harmful effects of MS symptoms?



HUMOR STYLES

MARTIN ET AL. 2003



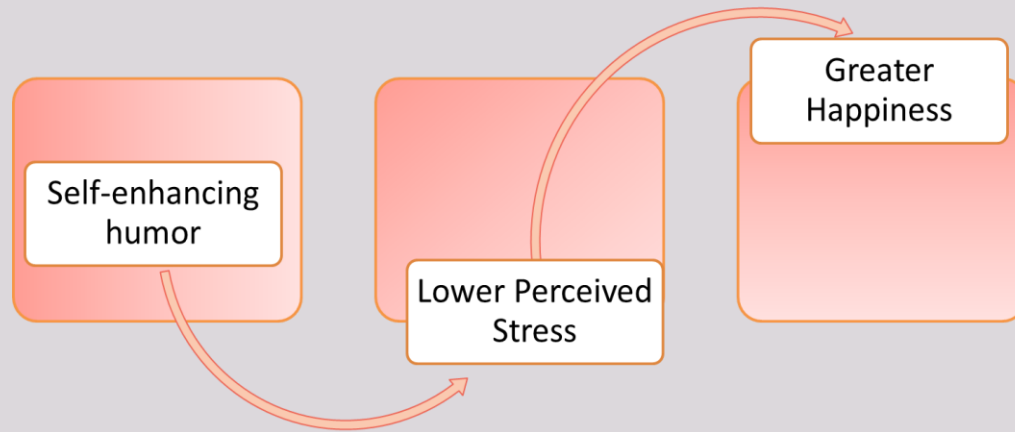
Humor Styles (Martin et al. 2003)

- Aggressive
 - *Humor that puts others down in order to raise one's own social acceptance*
- Affiliative
 - *Humor that is good-willed*
 - *Meant to raise social acceptance by making others laugh*
- Self-defeating
 - *Negative humor*
 - *Places oneself as the "butt" of the joke*
- Self-enhancing
 - *Humor that allows one to laugh at themselves in a positive way*
 - *Trivializes a negative situation, i.e. MS*

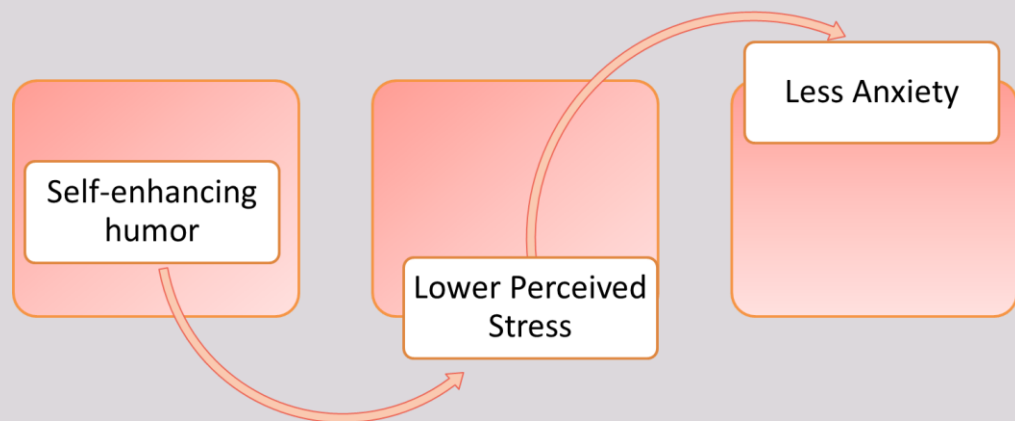
Previous Research

- Fritz, H. L., Russek, L. N., & Dillon, M. M. (2017)
 - *Humor use moderates the relation of stressful life events with psychological distress.*
- Fritz and colleagues designed a 3-part study to examine the relationship of SEH and anxiety among patients with fibromyalgia
 - *1: A correlational study*
 - *2: A diary study*
 - *3: An experiment with humor manipulation*

Hypotheses



Hypothesis 1: MS patients who have a self-enhancing humor style are **happier** because they perceive less MS related stress in their daily lives



Hypothesis 2: MS patients who have a self-enhancing humor style are **less anxious** because they perceive less MS related stress in their daily lives

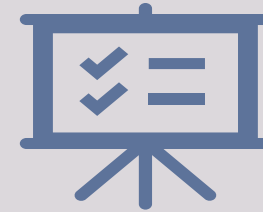
Method



Participants

Recruited from MultipleSclerosis.net

- All participants participated anonymously

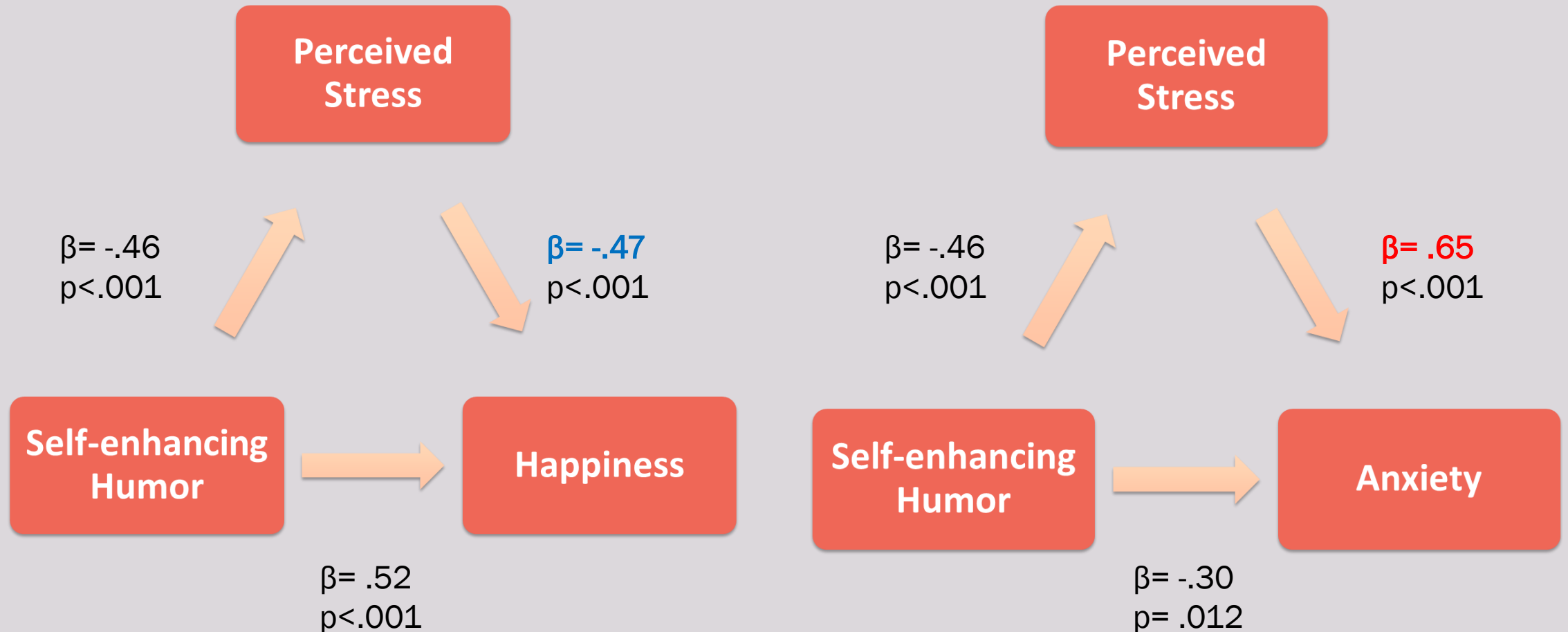


Procedure and Measures

Participants then completed four psychological measures:

- The Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) to measure SEH
- The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) to measure happiness
- The State Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) to measure anxiety
- The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) to measure perceived stress in daily life

Results



What We've Learned

MS patients who have a self-enhancing humor style are happier and less anxious *because* they perceive less stress in their everyday lives.

Self-enhancing humor style acts as a buffer to protect against the stressors of every life that make people anxious and unhappy.

Present Research

Study 2

- *An observational study of the use of humor in daily life*

Study 3

- *An experimental design that will require participants to use SEH and then think about their MS*

The Hope for the Future



An EEG study that assesses overall brain activation while participants view SEH



A cognitive therapy that targets the use of SEH as a coping mechanism

Broader Impact: Why does it matter?

- Health is more than just physical well-being
- It is also mental well-being

Acknowledgments

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MultipleSclerosis.net



THOUGHTS OR QUESTIONS?