

Researchers find link between humor and body image

October 12 2022



Values of self-enhancing and self-defeating humor across the four clusters.
 Credit: *HUMOR* (2022). DOI: 10.1515/humor-2022-0028

Women who use positive humor to describe themselves have higher levels of "body appreciation" than those who use self-deprecating humor, according to new research from the University of Surrey.

Researchers also found that along with having a negative view of their body, those who used self-defeating humor were also more likely to have

poor eating habits.

Dr. Fabio Fasoli, Lecturer in Social Psychology at the University of Surrey, said, "Having a [negative body image](#) can affect all areas of a person's life and lead to depression and [social anxiety](#). Often people don't talk openly about how they view their bodies, but how a person speaks about themselves through humor can provide valuable insights into such feelings."

In the first study of its kind, researchers from the University of Surrey explored the relationship between different styles of humor, body perception and eating behaviors in [women](#). Findings from this study can be used by [clinical psychologists](#) and eating disorder therapists to better understand their patients and promote the use of positive humor to improve their body image.

Researchers surveyed 216 people, analyzing their humor styles and perceptions of their bodies. The team from Surrey found that women who used self-defeating humor, putting themselves down in an aggressive fashion, were more likely to be highly critical of their bodies and possess a strong desire to be slimmer. Those who used such humor were also found to be emotional eaters, often making themselves feel worse about their bodies and putting them at risk of obesity and resulting illnesses.

In addition, it was identified that those who used self-enhancing humor, making yourself the target of the humor in a good-natured way, reported more body appreciation, and were associated with body kindness. Those who used this type of humor were less likely to be emotional eaters than their peers.

The Surrey team found that women who use both forms of humor reported a positive body image and had better eating habits than those

who primarily engaged in self-defeating humor.

Jane Ogden, Professor of Health Psychology at the University of Surrey, said, "People using themselves as the butt of jokes is often a technique to get approval from others, but it can also signify that something more worrying is going on in that person's life. This type of [humor](#) can indicate that a person is struggling with their [body image](#) and [self-esteem](#), which can have a long-lasting effect on their life."

The study was published in the journal *Humor*.

More information: Fabio Fasoli et al, The relationship between humor and women's body image concerns and eating behaviors, *HUMOR* (2022). [DOI: 10.1515/humor-2022-0028](https://doi.org/10.1515/humor-2022-0028)

Provided by University of Surrey

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