

# The Scale of Ethical Attitude toward Ethnic Humor (EATEH): Development, Reliability, and Validity

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## Abstract

Research on ethnic humor has been centered on initiators and functions of ethnic humor, ignoring people's ethical attitudes toward this type of humor. The purpose of the present article was to develop a scale measuring the ethical attitude toward ethnic humor, named EATEH (study 1). Further, we evaluated its relation to personal distress, empathic concern, perspective taking, authoritarianism, and self-efficacy (study 2). Exploratory factor analysis favored a one-factor structure, interpreted as a general ethical attitude toward ethnic humor that accounted for 55.9% of the total variance. EATEH obtained Cronbach's alpha of .94, indicating a high reliability. Multiple regression analysis showed that EATEH had considerable unique variance that was not explained by the tested psychological constructs (study 2). Hence, our scale is a novel and objective measure for evaluating ethical attitude toward ethnic humor.

**Keywords:** ethnic humor, ethical attitude, empathy, Iran

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Although people appear to be impartial on the surface, they still might have concealed negative beliefs about other ethnic and racial groups. During recent years, there has been a considerable amount of research reported on the transformation of traditional racism to more subtle and covert forms. (Brief, Dietz, Cohen, Pugh & Vaslow, 2000; Liu & Mills, 2006; Swim, Aikin, Hall & Hunter, 1995). On this ground, there is an emerging demand for research on subtle denigration of racial and ethnic groups under the veil of benign humor which is embodied in ethnic humor (Barnes, Palmary & Durrheim, 2001). Nevertheless, because of general lack of interest in studying ethics of humor (Best, 2007; Billig, 2001; Mik-Meyer, 2007; Mulkay, 1988), people's ethical attitude regarding ethnic humor has been left unexplored.

There have been heated arguments regarding the relation of ethnic humor to hatred. Davies (1982, 1990, 1998) suggests that ethnic humor is primarily humor rather than an indirect hostile or racist narrative. In his opinion, ethnic humor clarifies the inter-group boundaries, decreases ambiguity by targeting social, geographical, and moral boundaries, and consequently makes living in a multi-cultural society easier. He (1990) also stressed that people might not believe in jokes' stereotypes and asserts that the peripheral ethnicity that is targeted by ethnic humor might be hated or liked. In contrast, a body of literature has portrayed ethnic humor as a displacement of intergroup aggression that can be the source of pleasure in ethnic jokes (Billig, 2001; Husband, 1988; Mintz, 1996; Oshima, 2000; Perreault & Bourhis, 1998; 1999 for opposite argument see Davies, 1990). In addition,

ethnic humor can promote prejudice and make individuals have less hesitation to actualize the humor in practice (Ford, Boxer, Armstrong & Edel, 2008).

Ethnic humor usually makes fun of a group or members of a group by targeting their customs, behaviors, traditions, cloths, and their traits which form the sociocultural identity of that group (Apte, 1985, p. 198). The abrasive content of this type of humor can displease the mentioned ethnicity and make them feel offended. If offending others is a moral pejorative, then telling ethnic jokes that mock a peripheral group through disgraceful stereotypes could be – at least to some extent- morally questionable (Philips, 1984). For example, a survey carried out in the Unites States revealed that 55% of respondents agreed that jokes teasing blacks are more offensive and also showed that blacks and women, as compared to whites and men were more likely to call such jokes as offensive (Jaret, 1999). Hence, it is interesting to explore if people are aware that ethnic humor might offend others and also, if people consider an ethical boundary for ethnic humor.

The purpose of the present article is twofold which would be addressed in two studies. Primarily, to develop a new scale for measuring people's ethical attitude toward ethnic humor and evaluate its reliability and validity. Second, to explore the link between EATEH with empathy subscales and self-efficacy to see if these variables predict ethical attitude toward ethnic humor. These two studies will provide a background and a new tool for further research on ethical attitude toward ethnic humor.

### *1.2 Ethical Attitude toward Ethnic Humor (EATEH)*

There are some difficulties limiting ethical inquiries toward ethnic humor. First of all, this type of humor is popular (Apte, 1985, 1987; Davies, 1982, 1990, 1998) which also demonstrates that the offensive content of ethnic humor can be justified in terms of its popularity. Another difficulty in EATEH is the fact that philosophical inquiries have mostly failed to set up ethical boundaries or a clear distinction between clean and dirty humor. A joke that appears to be offensive to an individual in a specific situation might be quite acceptable to another. Cohen (1999) remarks that it is not easy to categorize clean and dirty ethnic humor or accuse it of being racist. He admits that there is no clue for drawing a border among acceptable and non-acceptable ethnic jokes: "some jokes on some occasions, and maybe some jokes on all occasions, are, as we say, "in bad taste," and should be thought of as morally objectionable. But it is very, very difficult to say just what this moral defect is" (p. 75). Therefore, EATEH seems to be situational and intuitive. It is up to the individual to put himself into the shoes of the mentioned ethnic group to see if the humor hurts. Furthermore, people tend to deny the content and purpose of ethnic humor. In this regard, Mulkay (1988) separates rules of "serious" and "humorous" discourses, as two different modes of interactions and remarks that "humor discourse" certainly can carry serious content that is always deniable (Drew, 1987; Kotthoff, 2000).

On these grounds, rather than absolute morals, studying the ethics of jokes should be based on ethical attitudes which is the base of the new measure of ethical attitude toward ethnic humor, developed in the current article. As measured by the new scale, EATEH concerns both in-group and out-group ethnic humor and pertains to the extent to which an individual ethically questions ethnic humor, finds them offending, predicts how they influence the target group, and behaviorally objects to this type of humor. Therefore, for measuring EATEH, individuals' reasons, feelings, and their behavioral reactions toward ethnic humor should be taken into consideration.

### *Study 1: Instrument Development, Reliability Estimation, and Exploratory Factor Analysis*

The purpose of this study was developing a new instrument for measuring ethical attitude toward ethnic humor and evaluating its reliability. In order to construct the items of the scale, a comprehensive literature search for the ethnic humor, ethics of jokes, and people's attitude toward humor was carried out. However, no scale or alternative method was found for measuring people's ethical reasoning toward ethnic jokes within the literature we reviewed, suggesting this field of research has been largely ignored.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Scale Development and Item Generation Procedure*

To construct the items, attitude toward racism and ethnic prejudice served as the major theoretical background of current research. Studies carried out on attitude toward prejudice, for example, have considered cognitive (beliefs), emotional (empathy), and also behavioral facets for measuring attitude toward prejudice (Jackman, 1977; Wang et al., 2003). Similarly, in constructing the items for evaluating ethical attitude toward ethnic humor (EATEH), these dimensions were taken into account. The idea behind the scale is that people who believe and reason that ethnic humor is offensive, is morally wrong to tell, and behaviorally object or disapprove ethnic humor, have a negative attitude toward this type of humor compared to those who are indifferent or supportive of ethnic humor. The scale, however, does not make a value judgment about the moral development of individuals

or humor-related moral values and only reflects different facets of ethical attitude toward ethnic humor.

The scale asks subjects' opinion about ethics of ethnic jokes (Note 1) and requires them to rate their beliefs using a 7-point Likert format in a way that "strongly agree" is given 1 point and "strongly disagree", 7 points. The items were phrased both negatively and positively to minimize response bias. Having negative phrases reverse-scored, each individual's score for ethical attitude toward ethnic humor was calculated by summing up all items. Higher scores indicated a more positive attitude toward ethnic humor i.e. "this type of humor is ethically Ok to tell".

In developing the items, careful attention was paid to minimize items' length and syntactic complexity given that brief and concise statements eliminate specious interpretations. Next, out of the generated items, 21 items which were more compatible with the criteria of the measurement were selected and ordered randomly to cancel out any sequence effects. Finally, to evaluate the face validity of the scale, one item was added at the end of the questionnaire asking the general attitude toward ethnic humor i.e. whether this type of humor is generally acceptable.

### *2.2 Participants and Sampling Procedure*

Participants were 214 individuals (74 male and 140 female), recruited randomly from the Shahid Chamran University, Ahvaz, Iran and ranged in age from 15 to 60 (Mean = 26.91, SD = 4.96). They were asked to fill out the 21-item questionnaire of the EATEH. In addition, some demographic items were added for assessing subjects' age, gender, and level of education which was reported based on years of education.

## **3. Data Analysis and Results**

SPSS 18.0 was used for data analysis. The criteria for including items as well as extracting factors followed Kaiser and Cattels' methods (Cattell, 1966; Kaiser, 1958).

### *3.1 Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analyses*

Since some items yielded high collinearity, a principal component analysis with Promax (oblique) rotation was performed (Field, 2009). We analyzed the data set with Promax (oblique) rotation three times by giving a limit of one, two, and three factors. Eventually, the one-factor structure was chosen based on the scree plot and the one-factor structure that had the highest internal consistency compared to other suggested structures. In addition, the one-factor analysis was more interpretable since the multi-component structures that SPSS suggested did not fulfill the prior sketch of the subscales and was difficult to interpret. All items with factor loading less than .50 were removed from the questionnaires, resulting in 15 remaining items out of the original 21 items (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2006). The selected component had an eigenvalue of 8.38, accounting for 55.9% of the total variance. Table 1 presents factor loadings, communalities, item-total correlations, means, and standard deviations of the scale.

Next, using Amos 18, confirmatory factor analysis was applied to confirm the validity and reliability of the scale by evaluating the factor loadings and fitness of the one-factor model. The resulting model was fitted based on theoretically sound correlations between errors, which resulted in acceptable fit indices (see Figure 1 and Table 2). Two of the factor loadings were close to acceptable but not above 0.50 (item 14 = 0.47; item 15 = 0.49); however, since we had acceptable model fit with enough factor loadings and the items also were theoretically good items, we kept the items in the final version of the questionnaire.

### *3.2 Normative Information and Internal Consistency*

As Table 1 shows, the scale had a mean of 53.24 for the total score with a standard deviation of 22.73. Dividing the total mean by the number of items, on average, people rated all items about 3.55, indicating a slightly negative ethical attitude toward ethnic humor.

### *3.3 Instrument Reliability*

The Cronbach's alpha, which represents the internal consistency of the scale, was found to be .94. This alpha suggests that the scale has a good reliability (Field, 2009).

Table 1. Items of ethical attitude toward ethnic humor

Item	Item-total correlation	Factor Loading	H <sup>2</sup>	M	SD
$\alpha = .94$				53.24	22.73
When I hear a joke teasing an ethnic or racial group, I feel such jokes should not be told.	.85	.88	.78	3.29	2.05
I feel very sorry that people often humiliate each other's race and ethnicity.	.79	.84	.70	3.02	1.97
A solution should be found for the problem of insulting ethnic and racial groups.	.80	.85	.72	2.79	1.98
I avoid telling jokes that make fun of a race or an ethnicity.	.75	.80	.64	3.43	2.06
I don't care if I hear a joke teasing my ethnic or racial group. *	.56	.61	.37	4.68	2.17
It feels like jokes that make fun of an ethnic or racial group are funnier. *	.68	.72	.52	3.79	2.07
I think jokes only mean to make fun. Therefore, it is permissible to make fun of members of an ethnic or racial group. *	.82	.85	.73	3.69	2.24
Sometimes I object to ethnic or racial jokes, even if they are not mentioning my ethnicity.	.63	.69	.47	3.69	2.11
I think people should entirely avoid telling jokes about other ethnicities and racial groups.	.78	.82	.68	3.18	2.07
I believe that ethnic jokes offend the mentioned ethnic and racial groups.	.62	.68	.46	2.77	1.65
Telling jokes about other racial and ethnic groups is somehow insulting their social and ethnic boundaries.	.78	.82	.68	3.39	2.05
I often laugh when I hear a joke teasing my ethnic or racial group. *	.66	.70	.48	4.78	1.96
I usually tell my friends jokes about my own ethnicity or racial group. *	.69	.73	.53	3.69	2.15
I think stereotypes ascribed to different ethnic or racial groups might be true. *	.50	.54	.29	3.70	1.97
For me, jokes that humiliate ethnic and racial stereotypes make sense because the stereotypes are evident and observable. *	.53	.56	.32	3.44	1.89

\*Items with reversed scoring.

Table 2. Fit Indices for CFA of EATEH variables

Model	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF	CFI	IFI	TLI	NFI	RMSEA
Default model	205.44	85	.000	2.42	.949	.949	.937	.916	.082
Saturated model	.000	0			1.000	1.000		1.000	
Independence model	2451.70	105	.000	22.35	.000	.000	.000	.000	.324

Chi-square (df) = 205.440 (85); P Value = .000

Relative Chi-sq = 2.417; CFI = .949

NFI = .916; TLI = .937; IFI = .949

RMSEA = .082

(Standardized Estimates)

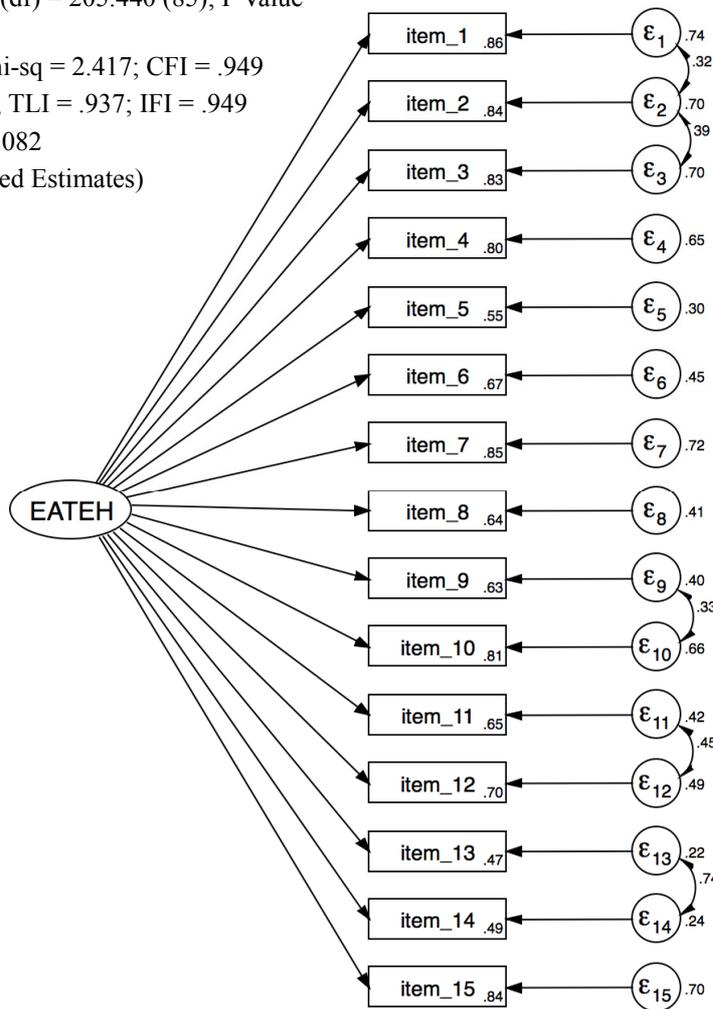


Figure 1. Factor analysis

### 3.4 Face Validity

To evaluate the face validity of the scale, we asked participants to assert and rate their general attitude of ethical acceptance of ethnic humor on a 7-point Likert format. The question was: “in general, to what extent do you think that ethnic humor is ethically OK to tell?” A Pearson correlation between the scale’s total score and this item revealed a significant result ( $r = .79$ ,  $p < .0001$ ) which supports the face validity of the scale.

### 3.5 Descriptive Statistics

In general, the participants reported a moderate attitude toward ethnic humor which was slightly negative. The Pearson correlation between level of education (measured by years of education) and EATEH was negative,  $r = -.12$ ,  $p < .05$  which indicates that people who were more educated had significantly more negative ethical attitude toward ethnic humor. However, age had no significant correlation with EATEH,  $r = -.07$ ,  $p > .05$ .

### Study 2: Validity Assessment

The purpose of study 2 was to examine the validity of the EATEH scale by investigating its relation to psychological factors such as self-efficacy, authoritarianism, and empathy subscales. These variables were extracted from studies carried out on people’s attitude toward other ethnic groups which often consider a variety of factors such as empathy, prejudice, racism, and ethnocentrism (Batson, Chang, Orr, & Rowland, 2002; Batson et al., 1997; Glover, 1994; Stephan & Finlay, 1999). Specifically, of particular interest in this study was to determine whether (a) empathy score can predict EATEH, (b) whether ethical attitude is correlated with

personality factors such as authoritarianism and self-efficacy, and (c) whether the EATEH score varies between genders. We hypothesized that the EATEH is influenced by perspective taking and emotional concern, which are two aspects of empathy. Both these empathy factors may positively correlate with EATEH. We also hypothesize that people with higher authoritarian tendencies will have more positive ethical attitude toward ethnic humor.

#### 4. Method

##### 4.1 Participants and Procedure

A sample of 500 14 to 18-year-old students (mean = 16.14, SD = .99) was randomly chosen from 10 high schools in Ahvaz, Iran. The subjects were told that participating and completing the survey was voluntary. The survey took about 30 minutes to complete. Nine subjects returned incomplete questionnaires and were dropped from the analysis. 194 subjects were female, 284 male, and 13 subjects left the gender question blank.

##### 4.2 Instruments and Data Coding

In addition to EATEH, subjects responded to three more questionnaires including Authoritarianism Scale, General Self-Efficacy, and Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI).

###### 4.2.1 Authoritarianism Scale

The 12-item authoritarianism scale, developed by Heydari, Teymouri, Nasiri, & Haghish (2012) was used for measuring authoritarian tendencies in students. This scale was developed for Iranian society and requires the subject to rate the items on a 5-point Likert format. The scale has a reliability coefficient of 0.88.

###### 4.2.2 General Self-Efficacy Scale

General Self-Efficacy (GSE) scale includes 10 items and was developed by Jerusalem and Schwarzer (2005). By testing 6 different sample pools, they found the internal consistency of the test to vary from .86 to .94. In another study, Luszczynska, Acholz, and Schwarzer (2005) validated the scale by reporting a significant association between the GSE and self-regulation, well-being, health behavior, coping strategies, implementation intentions, goal intentions, outcome expectations, and domain-specific self-efficacy. The Persian version of the GSE was provided by Nezami, Schwarzer, and Jerusalem (1996). The reliability and validity of the Persian version of GSE was also confirmed by Rajabi (1385/2006) who found a Cronbach alpha of .84 and a significant association with Rosenberg self-esteem scale.

###### 4.2.3 Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI)

This scale measures individual differences in both cognitive and emotional dimensions of empathy (Davis, 1983). The test includes four 7-item-subcales, which are fantasy, perspective taking, personal distress, and empathic concern. The fantasy subscale was excluded from the study since there was not much theoretical background for relating fantasy items to EATEH. The subscales' internal consistency varied from .71 to .77, and their test-retest reliability ranged from .62 to .71 (Davis, 1983). Davis reported a significant association for the subscales of IRI with other empathy instruments, self-esteem, social competence indexes, and sensitivity to others. This validated the IRI scale. Teymouri and Shahrzad (2012) translated the scale to Persian and examined its validity and reliability. They reported  $\alpha = .60$  for empathic concern,  $\alpha = .60$  for perspective taking, and  $\alpha = .63$  for personal distress. They also validate the scale by reporting a significant relation between IRI, moral authority, and attachment.

#### 5. Results

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3, showing that participants generally had a slightly negative attitude toward ethnic humor as well as high personal distress and an authoritarian tendency.

Next, we examined the associations between the variables with Pearson correlation (Table 4). Among the empathy subscales, perspective taking was negatively correlated with EATEH ( $r = -.27, p < .0001$ ) and personal distress was positively correlated with EATEH ( $r = .22, p < .0001$ ) whereas empathic concern did not have a significant relationship with EATEH. Authoritarianism was positively correlated with EATEH ( $r = .35, p < .0001$ , also mentioned in Haghish, Heydari, Biegler, Pfuhl, & Teymouri, 2013). There was also a significant negative relationship between self-efficacy and EATEH ( $r = -.14, p < .01$ ).

We also conducted t-tests to examine gender differences in EATEH, empathy, self-efficacy, and authoritarianism. Because the Levene's test for equality of variances was significant in EATEH, personal distress, and self-

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of all measured scales

Variables	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Age	16.14	.99	14	18
EATEH	41.59	18.20	15	105
Empathic Concern (IRI)	14.06	6.54	7	35
Personal Distress (IRI)	14.51	6.12	7	35
Perspective Taking (IRI)	18.35	7.35	7	35
Authoritarianism	34.26	9.27	15	60
GSE	27.02	6.80	10	47

efficacy, we did not assume equal variances for gender differences and corrected the t-tests to consider unequal variances. The results showed that men and women had significant differences in EATEH,  $t(470.66) = 4.06$ ,  $p < .0001$ , in which the mean score of males was significantly higher than the mean score of females EATEH (male:  $M = 44.15$ ,  $SD = 20.72$ , female:  $M = 37.94$ ,  $SD = 12.66$ ). Gender made no difference to Emotional Concern, perspective taking, Authoritarianism, Personal Distress, and Self-efficacy.

Table 4. Correlation between empathy subscales, authoritarianism, self-efficacy, and EATEH

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. EATEH	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Emotional Concern	-.04	-	-	-	-	-
3. Perspective Taking	-.27**	.80**	-	-	-	-
4. Personal Distress	.22**	.01	-.11*	-	-	-
5. Authoritarianism	.35**	-.05	-.06	.37**	-	-
6. Self-Efficacy	-.14**	.31**	.32**	-.21**	-.25**	-

Moreover, to find out that to what extent empathy subscales, authoritarianism and self-efficacy account for EATEH variance, we applied standardized regression analysis by entering EATEH as dependent variable and self-efficacy, authoritarianism, personal distress, and perspective taking as independent variables. The model was significant,  $R^2 = .19$ ,  $F(4, 486) = 28.86$ ,  $p < .0001$  in which 19% of the variance of EATEH was predicted by two subscales of empathy, authoritarianism and self-efficacy. The combination of predictors had a significant effect on EATEH,  $B = 24.40$ ,  $t = 4.87$ ,  $p < .0001$ , indicating that individuals who reported high perspective taking, low personal distress, lower level of authoritarianism, and high self-efficacy, had a more negative attitude toward ethnic humor. In addition, perspective taking ( $B = -.76$ ,  $\beta = -.26$ ,  $t = -5.96$ ,  $p < .0001$ ) and authoritarianism ( $B = .62$ ,  $\beta = .31$ ,  $t = 7.02$ ,  $p < .0001$ ) accounted for a significant proportion of variance of EATEH individually, while the unique effect of personal distress and self-efficacy were not significant. Notably, authoritarianism had the most significant effect on EATEH ( $\beta = .31$ ) and perspective taking was the second most significant predictor of EATEH ( $\beta = -.26$ ).

Table 5. Multiple regression analyses, using perspective taking, personal distress, authoritarianism and self-efficacy as predictors and EATEH as the dependent variable

Variable	B	SE	$\beta$	t	Sig
Constant	24.40	5.01		4.87	.001
Perspective Taking	-.76	.13	-.26	-5.96	.001
Personal Distress	.20	.11	.08	1.84	.067
Authoritarianism	.62	.09	.31	7.02	.001
Self-Efficacy	.12	.12	.05	1.04	.300

$R^2 = .19$ ,  $R^2 \text{ adj.} = .18$ ,  $F(4, 486) = 28.86$ ,  $p < .000$

## 6. Discussion

We developed a scale measuring ethical attitude toward ethnic humor (EATEH). In study 1 the final 15 items measured one's ethical attitude toward ethnic humor by taking emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects into account. These items were partly inspired from related fields, such as attitude toward racism and ethnocentrism, which measure cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of attitude (Batson et al., 1997; Pedersen, Beven, Walker & Griffiths, 2004). Notably, factor analysis favored a one-factor model, i.e. there were no subscales despite the various aspects of attitudes. Cronbach's alpha and the item-total correlation supported the reliability of the scale. The evidence for the validity of the test was provided by the second study. Significant correlation of EATEH with subscales of IRI, authoritarianism, and self-efficacy supported the criterion validity of the scale in which high perspective taking and self-efficacy as well as low score in personal distress and authoritarianism were associated with a more negative attitude toward ethnic humor. In the case of perspective taking and empathic feelings, a high score makes the individual more critical of using ethnic humor. We also found that a weaker authoritarian tendency correlated with a dislike of ethnic jokes. The result of a negative correlation between self-efficacy and EATEH is consistent with Bandura's proposition about characteristics of self-efficient individuals. Bandura (2001) asserted that being highly self-efficient makes individuals more cooperative, helpful, careful about each other's welfare, and encourages prosocial behavior.

Freud (1976) believed that humor is a way of releasing stress in an acceptable and less morally questionable way. Similarly, we found that high personal distress, which is an indicator of anxiety, was positively related to EATEH. High scores on authoritarianism were related to a positive attitude toward ethnic humor, too. Authoritarianism is related to ethnocentrism, racism, prejudice, and negative attitudes toward minorities (e.g. Lutterman & Middleton, 1970; Scheepers, Felling & Peters, 1990).

Previous research has shown that telling bad-taste jokes and humorous teasing is viewed as a high-risk action and is often associated with aggressive behavior. Since males are assumed to be verbally and behaviorally more aggressive than females (Harris, 1992; Hyde, 1984; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974, cited in Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006) and teasing is considered an aggressive behavior, we expected to find a more positive attitude toward ethnic humor in males (see Li & Zhu, 2008). For example, a study by Jaret (1999) revealed that men, as compared to women, had a more positive attitude toward jokes teasing blacks. Similarly, Carretero-Dios and Ruch (2010) found that males consider sexual, black, and women-disparagement humor less offensive than females. Our results supported these findings. Here, males' score was significantly higher on EATEH, showing that they asserted less ethical concern toward ethnic humor.

Empathy is often studied while seeing someone in distress and feeling the same (e.g. Dziobek et al., 2008; Iacoboni, 2009; Singer 2004), but the relation of empathy and ethnic humor has not received much attention. Our results revealed that from the three measured IRI subscales the perspective taking subscale and personal distress subscale, but not empathic concern subscale, were significantly correlated with EATEH. Therefore, people who are more emotionally sensitive and have higher abilities in considering others' points of view are more likely to have a negative ethical attitude toward ethnic humor. Demonstrating that empathy can partly predict EATEH agrees with previous research on empathy. Firstly, a large body of research has demonstrated that empathy is related to moral, caring, and prosocial behavior because it involves giving help to someone who is in trouble or distress (Barnett, Howard, King, & Dino, 1981; Batson et al., 1999; Batson et al., 1995; Hoffman, 1977, 2001; Krevans & Gibbs, 1996; Shelton & Rogers, 1981) and who might belong to a different group (Batson et al., 1991). Secondly, it has been found that empathy can influence individual's attitude toward members of another group (Batson et al., 1997) whereas lack of empathy relates to intergroup aggression (Struch & Schwartz, 1989; Wang et al., 2003), social dominance orientation (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994), and prejudice (Bäckström & Björklund, 2007; Johnson, Brems, & Alford-Keating, 1997; Whitley Jr, 1999).

Furthermore, empathy has been considered critical to all human relationships and communications (Duan & Hill, 1996; Omdahl, 1995) including both interpersonal (Hoffman, 1977, 1981, 2001; Kim, Kaplowitz & Johnston, 2004) and intercultural communications (Broome, 1991). For instance, Broome (1991, p. 235) indicated that "Empathy is associated with many important aspects of communication behavior, e.g., formulating communicative intentions and goals, devising strategies to accomplish communicative purposes, and constructing messages consistent with communicative strategies. These and other communication behaviors are usually seen as influenced by communicators' attempts (or lack thereof) to consider the perspective of the other person". This research considers the ability to empathize with others as a potential factor in reducing conflict and promoting mutual understanding among different ethnic groups of multiethnic societies (Batson et al., 1995; Carrell, 1997; Sue & Sue, 1990; Wang et al., 2003).

## 7. Conclusion

The ethics of humor and, especially, people's ethical attitude toward ethnic humor deserve more attention. Our newly developed scale measures one's ethical attitude toward ethnic humor. The scale includes several dimensions such as emotional, cognitive, and behaviors aspects in evaluating the ethical attitude toward ethnic humor.

As such, the EATEH instrument may allow a more subtle study of racism, ethnocentrism, prejudice, and personality. Given that "racism has gone below the surface", i.e. expressing racist statements is considered inappropriate or immoral, racist thinking might well be shown on the EATEH score. Thus, ethnic humor may be a hidden way of expressing prejudice towards the out-group but also measurable exactly through this channel.

Finally, the scale overcomes some of the current difficulties in studying the ethics of humor. Instead of ending up at the point where the content of jokes can always be covered by saying that it is merely a joke that meant to be funny and not offensive the novel EATEH scale mainly resolves this issue by measuring how one feels, reasons, and reacts to ethnic humor. This will provide a useful and objective measure also in the field of racism, prejudice, and ethnocentrism.

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## Note

Note 1. In Iranian context, ethnic humor and ethnic jokes are considered synonym. This is why the items are referring to ethnic jokes rather than ethnic humor.

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