Master thesis

Humour and well-being: Exploring the effect of humour on well-being in the podcast

"Betreutes Fühlen"

Smits, I.

s1983415

BMS Faculty,

Department of Psychology,

University of Twente

Examination committee:

Jacky van de Goor

Anneke Sools

HUMOUR, PODCASTS AND WELL-BEING

Abstract

Background: The idea of receiving psychoeducation through self-help podcasts and thereby achieving a better sense of well-being sounds too good to be true, but is this possible? This study looked into this question and considered a humorous self-help podcast for this purpose. The study explored how participants experienced humour in podcasting and sought to determine the potential benefits of different humour styles on improving well-being in individuals suffering from anxiety symptoms. **Method:** In this study nine participants suffering from minor to medium anxiety symptoms were asked to listen to two episodes of the German self-help podcast "Betreutes Fühlen" ("Supervised Feeling"). Two focus groups engaging in the discussion were then conducted to get insights into the experience with humour in the podcast. The discussions were analysed by using thematic analysis. Humour styles were identified using the four humour styles described by Martin and others (2003). These styles have not been extensively researched in therapy settings yet. The change in well-being in participants has been explored by using the PERMA model inductively. **Results:** Participants perceived self-affiliative, self-enhancing, and self-defeating humour styles in the podcast. Furthermore, they also perceived self-deprecating humour as an additional humour style. The experiences with these humour styles were primarily positive and perceived beneficial for the listeners' well-being and anxiety mitigation. However, the experienced impact on well-being and anxiety mitigation differed per humour style. **Conclusion:** The research paper highlights the potential positive impact of the humorous podcast "Betreutes Fühlen" on the listeners' well-being and anxiety. However, taking into consideration that the scientific information was primarily associated with the podcast, it seems advisable for future research to explore what is needed for listeners to become more appreciative of the humorous aspects of self-help podcasts.

Contents

Introduction

"It is well known that humour, more than anything else in the human make-up, can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds."

— *Viktor E. Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning*

Throughout history, the immense power of humour has repeatedly been demonstrated. For example, Viktor Frankl, one of the founding fathers of meaning, has shown that humour can function as a survival strategy (Popova, 2019). Based on personal experience as a concentration camp prisoner, he illustrated the power of humour in finding meaning in life and surviving even under the most inhumane, cruel, and life-threatening conditions (Popova, 2019).

Although the great impact of humour in exceptional life circumstances has long been recognized, scientists have started to deal with the positive impacts of humour on mental health only forty years ago (Menéndez-Aller et al., 2019). In today's science, humour has become an integral part of positive psychology and research on well-being (Crawford & Caltabiano, 2011). Findings suggest that possessing humorous skills provides individuals with a sense of control over negative emotions, evokes positive ones, and promotes psychological well-being (Crawford & Caltabiano, 2011; Houston et al., 1998). Beyond these findings, there is convincing evidence that the perception of humour can support the alleviation of anxiety by evoking positive emotions and activating the brain's reward system (Papousek, 2018).

This thesis investigates the role of humour in self-help podcasts. As of yet, there is no scientific research dealing with the influence of perceived humour on well-being in listeners suffering from anxiety complaints in the context of this particular medium (Casares & Binkley, 2021). However, the topic deserves special attention because humour can increase well-being and alleviate anxiety. Humour can easily be integrated into self-help tools such as self-help podcasts, and the latter is gaining popularity. It is therefore promising to use humour in podcasts as a low-threshold therapeutic tool for self-help. Hence, this study explores in which ways

listening to a self-help podcast may induce a sense of well-being in participants experiencing anxiety complaints.

Clarification of concepts and purposes

Podcasts as a promising self-help instrument

Podcasts are designated as a digital mass medium that is mainly used for information retrieval and entertainment (Lindgren, 2016). In the last couple of years, they gained much popularity (Casares, 2020). While in 2004, there were less than 1000 podcasts available online, today, there are more than 1.000.000 just on the Apple platform, which implies a thousandfold increase (Casares, 2020). One main reason for the growing popularity of this medium involves its adaptation to today's living conditions. Podcasts fit the to-go lifestyle since 66% of the Germans prefer listening to podcasts while in public transportation, 34% while cleaning, and 31% while going to sleep (Statista, 2017).

Podcasts, like radio, explore life through speech and sounds (Lindgren, 2016). Visual input is not necessarily required. In case the podcast offers narratives, the listener is enabled to exclusively focus on the audio medium, which stimulates his or her imagery, helping to illustrate the individual's inner life (Lindgren, 2016). Stories listened to in the podcast can be related to the self, supporting the development of new understanding and insights (Lindgren, 2016). However, there is limited research on the effect of podcasts in clinical settings with a tendentious positive outlook (Casares, & Binkley, 2021). Among the few studies, the one by Davidson and others (2019) is first worth mentioning. They showed that using a narrative approach in podcasts can serve as a psychoeducational tool, as it provides the individual listeners with knowledge about mental disorders, it allows the audience to view illness experience from the perspective of other individuals suffering from similar complaints, and the podcast may propose treatment options (Davidson et al., 2019). Evidence for the promotion of behavioural change and growth is provided by the study of Mailey and colleagues (2019). They examined the impact of listening to podcasts weekly on health behaviour and symptoms of

anxiety and depression. Their findings suggest a positive impact of podcasts on health behaviour and mental illness (Mailey et al., 2019).

Given the increased popularity of listening to podcasts, the influence of this digital audio medium on mental health, the communication technique of humour that potentially alleviates symptoms of mental illness is of value to be explored. Regarding the inclusion of humour in podcasts, Paul Gilmartin, an American comedian, was one of the first artists who started to combine comedy and self-help in a podcast called the" *Mental Illness Happy Hour" (MLHH)* (Dowling, 2012). According to Meserko (2014), MLHH seems valuable for establishing an intimate connection between the speaker and the listener. It gives the listener the feeling to be not alone (Meserko, 2014). Also, it has been demonstrated that listening to this podcast brings a positive change concerning the audience's attitudes towards the presence and treatment of mental illnesses, like anxiety disorders (Nathan, 2018).

Mental well-being – Conceptualisation

The dominant focus on the reduction and treatment of illness symptoms is reflected in the research presented above. Over the decades, symptoms and symptom reduction was the overall focus of the traditional psychological approach and certainly, this approach has its place in the mental health care sector. However, assuming that an individual must be happier and more satisfied with life when illness symptoms are cured holds a false promise (Renshaw & Cohen, 2014). Recent studies suggest that the absence of psychopathology does not imply the presence of mental well-being (Bohlmeijer & Westerhof, 2019; Keyes,2005). Yet, sustainable mental health includes well-being as a fundamental core element (WHO,2014). Mental well-being predicts recovery and protects against mental disorders (Schotanus-Dijkstra et al., 2019). Hence, exploring the signs and expressions of mental well-being seems of equal value to exploring mental pathologies and will be the primary focus of this study.

Mental well-being in itself is a multidimensional concept (Bohlmeijer & Westerhof, 2019). It comprises emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being

(Bohlmeijer & Westerhof, 2019). Emotional well-being involves the experience of happiness, interest in life, and satisfaction. Psychological well-being is focused on the individual. It is about personal growth, development and realizing one's potential (Westerhof & Keyes, 2010). Social well-being is concerned with personal fulfilment and optimal functioning in social contexts (Westerhof & Keyes, 2010). All the three concepts of well-being are comprised in the PERMA model (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment), which is a positive psychological model of well-being (Seligman, 2018) (see Appendix A for a detailed description of all PERMA-elements).

Conceptualising humour and the effects of humour by explanatory models

Now that the concept of well-being has been clarified, the central question is how humour affects well-being. With the definition, humour has taken on various meanings and functions (Ruch & Hofmann, 2017). These include mood, character strength, defence mechanism, means of communication, and many more. In contemporary academia, humour is often used as a generic term for something funny or comical but is also understood as distinct from other terms such as sarcasm or cynicism. Nevertheless, there is no precise conceptualisation of humour in the research community (Ruch & Hofmann, 2017).

Although the conceptualisation of humour proves to be difficult, Martin and others (2003) have found four different humour styles in individuals that are either positively or negatively related to well-being. They developed a model which is related to the four different styles in the use of humour in individuals. The first style of humour is called *affiliative humour* (Martin et al., 2003). This style of humour is used to relieve interpersonal tension and foster a sense of belonging (Martin et al., 2003). Examples of this humour style include the usage of funny phrases, telling jokes, and spontaneous, witty sayings to entertain others (Brown 2019). The second style of humour is *self-enhancing humour*. It is a kind of coping humour that supports negative emotions regulation through humorous perspective-taking (Martin et al., 2003). It is assumed that this element of humour is negatively correlated with psychological

issues, including post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and depression (Sliter et al., 2013; Menéndez-Aller et al., 2020). This style of humour is often perceived in emergency service personnel, who must cope with intensely traumatic events (Kuiper, 2012). It is assumed that this style of humour acts as a protection to distance oneself from adverse situations and to promote social support (Kuiper, 2012).

Thirdly, *self-defeating humour* is used as a form of defensive denial or the tendency to use humorous behaviour as a method to hide one's true and negative feelings (Martin et al., 2003). Researchers are mostly unanimous in their view that self-defeating humour can foster maladaptive relationships, even though it might be at the expense of the self (Leist & Müller, 2013; Caudill & Woodzicka, 2017).

The last style of humour, named *aggressive humour* is a harmful style (Martin et al., 2003). It is applied to hurt other individuals by insulting or teasing them. It is also used to manipulate others through an implicit threat of ridicule (Martin et al., 2003). This style of humour is often associated with pathological personality disorders, like Antagonism (Zeigler-Hillet et al., 2016).

Generally, it can be concluded that *affiliative humour,* as well as *self-enhancing humour* are positively correlated with emotional and psychological well-being (Martin et al., 2003). Beyond that, both are also positively correlated with social well-being, as their use supports the establishment of new relationships (Cann & Kuiper, 2014). The third style seems to have negative impacts on the self but seems benevolent to others. Hence, this style of humour is negatively correlated with psychological well-being (Saulo,2014). Finally, the fourth style appears injurious for individuals, and it negatively correlates with well-being.

Anxiety symptoms – Interesting field for investigation

For several reasons, individuals with anxiety symptoms seem a suitable target group for this study. First of all, symptoms of anxiety are among the most prevalent mental health problems experienced by individuals worldwide (Rickwood & Bradford, 2012). Even mild forms of

anxiety involve significant impairment of the quality of life of individuals as well as a huge economic burden for society (Cuijpers, & Schuurmans, 2007; Davey, 2014). Consequently, individuals suffering from anxiety symptoms are experiencing less well-being (De Beurs et al., 1999; Iani et al.,2019). Another reason concerns the way in which people with anxiety tend to deal these symptoms. Where individuals suffering from anxiety complaints are confronted with lengthy waiting lists and limited availability of licensed psychologists and psychotherapists (Itzler et al., 2018), a great number of them do not seek professional treatment (Cuijpers, & Schuurmans, 2007). Rather, they choose to cope with their condition on their own (Issakidis, & Andrews, 2002). Ultimately, individuals suffering from anxiety are more likely to report using self-help tools than professional counselling (Issakidis, & Andrews, 2002), emphasising the potential appeal of podcasts as self-help tools.

Since humour, besides its value of improving well-being, may also have an anxiety-relieving effect, it may have the potential to be of value to individuals experiencing anxiety symptoms. Thus, individuals with anxiety symptoms will comprise the target group of this study.

The purpose of this study

Studies revealed the benefits of podcasts as they might offer a new and innovative way to convey low-threshold therapeutic support. Furthermore, humour has been noted to potentially increase a sense of well-being while diminishing symptoms of anxiety (Martin et al.,2003). As introduced previously, the use of self-affiliative humour and self-enhancing humour has been in particular discerned to potentially improve well-being (Martin et al.,2003). Though the perception of humour and its role in the scope of well-being in podcasts has not been adequately explored. Therefore, this paper aims to explore how the use of humour in podcasts affects the well-being of listeners suffering from anxiety complaints.

For this purpose, a specific German podcast aimed at people with mental health issues, and in which humour plays a significant role, was chosen as an example. The podcast is called

"Betreutes Fühlen" ("Supervised Feeling"). "Betreutes Fühlen" is directed by the German comedian Atze Schröder and the psychologist Leon Windscheid. A unique feature of this podcast lies in the combination of two presenters having different backgrounds. Whereas Leon Windscheid, as a psychologist, approaches the topics scientifically, Atze Schröder, as a comedian, participates by sharing his own experiences in a personal and humorous manner. Accordingly, the research question is twofold:

1. (How) do listeners to the podcast "Betreutes Fühlen" experience humour and what styles of humour do they notice in the podcast?

2. How does the perceived humour affect their sense of well-being?

Method

Focus group study

The design of the study is a focus group discussion of podcasts. Focus groups are often used in qualitative research for health and social sciences (Parker & Tritter, 2006). This research approach promotes the exchange of experience, opinions, and feelings among participants (Kinalski et al., 2017; Morgan, 1997). It gives the researcher an insight into the values, attitudes, perceptions of the participants and thereby enhances, as cited in Kinalski et al. (2017), "the understanding, description, and analysis of reality through the dynamics of the social relationships." This design was employed as a means to investigate the effects of listening to the podcast on well-being in participants with anxiety symptoms. One researcher performed the project and analysed the data. The project was granted ethical approval by the BMS Ethics Committee of the University of Twente, domain Humanities & Social Sciences, in 2021 (210272).
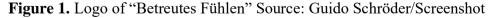
Background

In order to find an appropriate podcast for the research project, more than 15 podcasts have been screened for their suitability. Podcasts that did not deal with the topic of anxiety were excluded. Another exclusion criterion entails the lack of scientific substantiation. Scientific

substantiation could be reached by incorporating the presence of at least one trained psychologist who can provide reliable and evidence-based information. In addition, podcasts originating from countries other than Germany were excluded, as only German native speakers took part in the study. The main inclusion criterion was centred around humour. In the end, "Betreutes Fühlen" was chosen, as it met all criteria.

"Betreutes Fühlen" was published by Leon Windscheid and Atze Schröder in 2019. Max Leon Windscheid (born 1988) studied psychology and completed his doctorate in economics at the University of Witten/Herdecke on gender diversity in companies and women in top management positions in 2017. Today he is known for being a psychologist, entrepreneur, and author (LW, 2021). Atze Schröder is the stage name of Thomas Schröder, born in 1965. He became famous for the stand-up comedy broadcast show and the television comedy series called "Alles Atze" in 2000. Since then, he is known for being a comedian (Weidner, n.d.). In "Betreutes Fühlen," they talk about topics such as human fears, coping strategies, and self-acceptance (Spotify, 2021) (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Logo of "Betreutes Fühlen" Source: Guido Schröder/Screenshot

The podcast is designed for the public. It is easy to follow, entertaining, engaging, and learner focused. Besides psychological research, personal narratives, including problems and experiences, are exchanged and publicized. This approach conveys to the podcast audience a feeling of connection and closeness with the presenters. The style of presentation is informal,

personal, relaxed, and funny. As previously mentioned, the speakers used affiliative and self-enhancing humour primarily in this podcast, as judged by the researcher. The humour styles were reflected in funny stories, funny anecdotes, and the maintenance of humour in the discussion of difficult situations which the speakers faced during their lifetime.

The podcast is financed by advertising revenue, which is often played at the beginning of the episodes. The podcast reviews are predominantly positive, thus receiving 4.7 stars from 1,783 ratings (Chartable, 2021). In total, 1.000.000 million individuals have subscripted the podcast (Leonwindscheid, 2021 – Instagram).

Two episodes dealing with the theme of anxiety have been chosen for this study. The first episode, "Angst" deals with the general topic of anxiety. This episode mainly centers on the personal exchange of the two podcast speakers and their experiences with anxiety. The second episode "Bindungsangst" deals with the topic of attachment anxiety. In this episode, personal experiences and evidence-based studies on attachment anxiety and its consequences are presented. As guest Stephanie Stahl, graduate psychologist, and attachment anxiety expert, participated. The combination of both podcast episodes has been chosen for this study because both sequences make anxieties a subject of discussion in the podcast. Furthermore, both topics are thematically intertwined as research has indicated that poor childhood attachment experiences increase the risk of developing Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) later in life (Cassidi et al., 2009). The episode "Angst" takes 54 min (Schröder & Windscheid, 2019)., whereas the episode "Bindungsangst" takes 93 min. (Schröder & Windscheid, 2021).

Participants and recruitment

In total, eleven participants were invited to participate in the research project, of whom ten responded. A convenience sampling method was used to recruit participants, whereby the experimenter asked family members, acquaintances, and one fellow student to participate in the study. Jones and her colleagues (2018) found that "friendship groups" are potentially

valuable for qualitative inquiry, as they seem to be viable and cost-effective (Jones et al., 2018).

The first criterion to participate in the study includes the listening of the two podcast episodes presented above. One of the invited participants did not meet the criterion and was excluded from the study. Another selection criterion for participants compromised the experiences of at least minor mental health complaints, in particular symptoms of anxiety. In order to measure their level of anxiety, they received a german version of the General Anxiety Disorder- 7 scale (GAD-7). This is a 7-item diagnostic tool applied to measure the degree of severity of anxiety symptoms according to the DSM-IV criteria (Johnson et al., 2019). Participants are asked how often they felt affected by anxiety complaints before listening to the podcast in the last two weeks. All invited participants scored at least minor anxiety complaints (see table 1 for the scores). Furthermore, it was also crucial to be familiar with modern technology insofar as any participant had to use a smartphone or a computer to listen to the podcast on Spotify or YouTube. Every individual participant showed their competence to meet this criterion.

Finally, the participants' sample comprised five females and four males aged 26 to 57 years old, with an average age of 32 years. All test subjects originate from western industrialized countries and were native German speakers.

Table 1

Demographic statistics and scoring in the GAD-7 of participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Occupation	GAD-7
Anne	26	Female	Student	8
Alice	56	Female	Physician	6
Amra	32	Female	PhD Candidate in plant biochemistry	7

Annabelle	35	Female	Theologian	7
Benedict	27	Male	Mechatronics engineer	12
Benjamin	32	Male	Electrician	6
Boris	57	Male	Electrician	5
Anton	33	Male	Unemployed	5
Birgit	53	Female	Butcher	9

Note. Names were replaced with pseudonyms. Interpretation of scoring in the GAD-7: 0-4 no/minimum anxiety, 5-9: mild, 10-14: moderate, 15-21: severe anxiety.

Focus group interview

The data relating to the participants' experiences with "Betreutes Fühlen" were collected by conducting two semi-structured focus group interviews. The posed questions induced the participants to describe their experience with the podcast. With regard to humour, they were openly asked about what style of humour they noticed. In case they could not come up with a description of the humour style they perceived, they were asked more directly. For example, they were asked: "Did you perceive a humour style that seemed hurtful for another human being" or "Did the humour have a negative impact on you?". The entire interview schedule can be found in Appendix B.

Data collection and procedure

Participants were requested to listen to the two podcasts episodes on their own. In general, participants had one week to listen to the podcast episodes. However, they could decide autonomously when, where, and how they wanted to listen to the podcast to fulfil their need for autonomy and create the listening process as naturalistic as possible (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Hence, the time between listening to the podcast and the focus group discussion varies among participants. Before participating in the focus group discussion, all participants signed informed consent and were informed about the confidentiality of their sensitive information.

The first focus group was invited to a virtual room in Zoom to participate in a focus group discussion on May 2, 2021. The second focus group took place in vivo at the researcher's home on May 30, 2021. Participants were randomly assigned to the two focus groups, each consisting of four to five participants. The size of the focus group comprises a "small focus group", which has the advantage of a more straightforward recruitment process and makes participants feel more comfortable in the group (Stewart et al., 2017). In both focus group meetings, the participants were told that the study was designed to explore the experience with the podcast "Betreutes Fühlen." Participants have deliberately not been informed that the focus of the study was set on the role of humour to avoid priming the participants.

The first discussion took 62 minutes. The second discussion took 61 minutes. Both focus group discussions were conducted in the German language. After the discussion, participants were thanked for taking their time and participation and were dismissed.

Data analysis

The recorded audio files from both focus groups were transcribed into electronic format by the researcher involved in the data collection. In order to treat the personal information of participants confidential, the participants were assigned pseudonyms. Pseudonyms of the first focus group start with an "A", whereas names of the second focus group begin with a "B". Then, the guidelines provided by Braun and Clark (2006) were followed to carry out a thematic analysis. Firstly, the transcripts were read several times to familiarise with the dataset. In the iterative reading process, ideas and notes were actively written down. After familiarising the data, initial codes were generated using Atlas.ti to identify "meaningful chunks" in the dataset and generate initial codes. The researcher used both an inductive and deductive approach. Deductively, the data were coded by using Martin's model of humour. Inductively, codes beyond the model were created. After that, further codes based on the humour styles found and their relation to elements of the PERMA-model of well-being and anxiety reduction were developed inductively. The focus in the inductive

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approach was set on the pure experience the listener had with the podcast. The researcher used a semantic approach in her analysis as she did identify codes within the meaning of spoken words (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Then, codes were reviewed and sorted into feasible themes. In this process, both themes and sub-themes were identified. Moreover, discrepancies of themes identified were addressed and, if necessary, resolved. In the next step, all themes identified were reviewed. To ensure reliability, the transcripts were shared with another researcher. This researcher elaborated the themes on an independent coding scheme. Later on, the codes were compiled, and similarities and difficulties were analysed and discussed, resulting in an overall adaptation of several codes. Furthermore, discrepancies becoming apparent in retrospect were discussed with fellow psychology students at the University of Twente.

Results

In the following, the findings resulting from the analysis of the two focus group interviews will be presented. The results are arranged according to the two research questions. The first research question aims to get an insight into the listener's experience with the podcast "Betreutes Fühlen", followed by the perception of different humour styles within the podcast. The second research question investigates the impact of the different humour styles on well-being. Overall, the findings across both (A and B, see supra) focus group discussions showed considerable similarities in their experience with humour, with only slight differences in the perception between subjects. In both groups, it was observed that a minority of participants dominated the whole focus group discussion, which ended in the suppression of information of at least one participant in each group.

A general impression of the participants' experience

While exploring the experience with the podcast, participants were asked how they experienced the podcast episodes. The initial reaction shows that the participants' attention was rather directed towards the podcast's informative nature than to humour. The following

quote demonstrates this proposition: "I first saw the podcast "Attachment Anxiety" and I thought it was excellent, I thought it was well evidenced." (ll.7 ff.). Boris, another participant from the second focus group, immediately referred to the guest psychologist Stephanie Stahl when asked about his experience with the podcast: "I found her part, that is, what she told, the most interesting part of the whole podcast." (ll.479 ff). Anton, one of the participants in the first group, independently confirmed Boris' view: "… but I also think that he sticks a bit better than the other one...yes, because of this specialist who was also there." (ll.22 ff.). Ultimately, humour has not been mentioned in the first place. However, the participants emphasized their interest concerning the scientific evidence.

Further, the evaluation of the experience with listening to the podcast episodes was followed by a rating for the different speakers. Thereby, focus group participants contrasted the two distinct speakers Stephanie Stahl and Atze Schröder, and their presentation style. Apparently, sympathies differed widely. Stephanie Stahl was described as "humourless" (ll.356 f.) by two participants, as she offered an objective and factual presentation of attachment anxiety. Eventually, it seemed that the evidence-based strategy being used by Stephanie Stahl potentially harmed some participants: "Steffi Stahl has created fears in me with her statements" (ll.232 f.). Others felt rejection: "...so she was so over-confident that sometimes I was a bit.... yes, I don't know...repelled…" (ll.28 ff.). Besides, her presentation led one participant to the attempt to find information contradicting her statements: "I am now going on the counterattack and looking for information that refutes her thesis" (ll. 467 f.). Nonetheless, it seems worth mentioning that in particular participants of the second focus group felt positively affected by Stephanie's style of presentation and her educational attainment initiated premature praise in this group, which is shown in Benjamin's quote "This professionalism from the psychologist is simply more credible" (ll.567 ff.).

In contrast, Atze Schröder, the second speaker offered a humorous narrative about his own experiences with anxieties in the podcast, which is substantiated by Alice: "Yes, he

explained very openly and humorously what fears he had" (ll.261 f.). It was noticeable, that the association with Atze Schröder, the fictional character, with which participants had points of contact before listening to the podcast, influenced their experience with him, as is shown in this quote: "He is a character that he has created over the years...and this is associated with humour, and this automatically. You don't assume that Atze Schröder will give you a dry scientific lecture and that makes you less afraid of it" (ll.306 ff.). This statement expresses a certain attitude of expectation, suggesting an open mind concerning humour.

Nevertheless, not everyone seemed open to the comedic elements in the podcast and the use of humour eventually became less trustworthy in two participants. Further, it seems that listeners exhibited belief perseverance, which means that they perpetuate their initial belief about the role and trustworthiness of a comedian: "... but it is simply more trustworthy...that is, what comes across from her than what comes across from Atze, from such a comedian" (ll.568 ff.). In the end, it seemed that the experience with the podcast is affected by prior points of contact with the speakers and belief systems. Listeners draw an association with the different speakers, which biased their judgment concerning the gathered information.

Styles of humour

With regard to the second limb of the first research question, participants were asked what styles of humour they detected. In this process, three styles of humour of the previously described Martin model (Martin et al., 2003) have been found to appear, namely self-enhancing humour, affiliative humour, and self-defeating humour. Still, the fourth style of aggressive humour did not occur. One additional style of humour, self-disparaging humour has been found. The results are presented in Table 2, after which each humour style will be described.

Table 2

Humour styles mentioned by the participants based on Martins Model

Type of humour	Description	Frequency	Quote
affiliative	Making jokes and telling funny stories to others. It is used to improve interpersonal relationships. Adaptive humour style	11	"For example, I noticed that in between there was always a slight hint of a joke being thrown out" (ll.490 ff.).
self-enhancing	Coping humour. Remaining a positive/ humorous outlook under challenging situations. A form of tension relives. Adaptive humour style.	12	"Yes, he explained very openly and humorously what fears he had" (ll.260f.).
self-defeating	Amusing others by doing or saying funny things at one's own expense. Maladaptive humour style	1	"To ridicule one's own fear, isn't that also an escape?" (ll.833 ff.).
aggressive	Making fun of others in ridicule and mean ways to threaten or psychologically harm others. Maladaptive humour style	0	/
self-deprecating	Amusing others, making fun of oneself in a self-accepting manner	5	"So that was a kind of humour, like not taking yourself so seriously, taking oneself for a ride...so in any case an acceptable kind of humour, a sympathetic kind" (ll.380 ff).

Affiliative humour in the form of funny stories or telling jokes were noted and reflected on. All participants agreed that the story with the child on the leash provided the most

amusement (see Appendix C). The story is about a "chubby boy" eating ice cream who observes a mother walking with her child on the leash. Whereas none of the adults dares to comment on this situation, he just screams: "ohhaaa someone has his child on a leash". With this statement, this child blows up the situation. This story is affiliative because it is narrated from the observing child's point of view. Thus, it amused participants without creating a hurtful/hostile atmosphere: "What I found amusing at the beginning, or what amused me a bit, is the subject matter with the child on the leash" (ll..669 ff.) In a similar vein, Amra noted: "I have to say, I had to laugh with the little fat boy, who was the only one who stopped and what did he say, ah someone is walking with his child on a leash" (ll.103 ff.).

The style of self-enhancing humour was mainly noticed in Atze's expressions. For example, Annabelle noticed that Atze explained humorously how he learned to embrace his fears. "For example, he said, he could learn to embrace his fear […] And I think it was easy to take up because of this funny way" (ll.286 ff.). This quote presents Atze's use of humour in coping with the unpleasant feelings of anxiety. It also shows how this style offered an opportunity to restructure negative cognitions and helped Annabelle maintain a positive outlook. Based on these findings, we can speak of self-enhancing humour in this context.

The style of self-defeating humour had been indirectly mentioned by only one participant, as he asked: "To ridicule one's own fear, isn't that also an escape?" (ll. 833 ff.). This note raises the question of whether Atze used humour to deny his negative feelings. In the further course of the interview, Benjamin joined in and agreed that Atze partly ridicules his fear by including humour. "He put it across in such a comedic and amusing way that it came across as ridiculous, definitely" (ll. 837 ff.). However, in Benjamin's opinion, Atze did not harm himself: "No, he is not ridiculing himself" (ll.874 f.). Consequently, not all criteria for this style of humour are met, implying an incomplete experience with self-defeating humour.

Although three of the four humour styles described by Martin (Martin et al., 2003) were found, the fourth style of aggressive humour has not been mentioned by the listeners, nor

perceived. The following statement demonstrates this finding: "I didn't find it aggressive in that sense. Sometimes I found it a bit ... 'hmm I don't have a word for it" (ll.397 ff.). Consequently, no indication for the aggressive humour style appeared to be perceived by participants. This was also in the interest of the researcher and has been one of the selection criteria of the podcast.

Furthermore, an additional style of humour was discovered in the interview of the focus groups, which is called self-deprecating humour. In contrast to self-defeating humour, this form of humour is directed against oneself but in a self-accepting manner (Brown et al., 2013). Annabelle's view shows the humour user's ability to laugh at himself without causing a detrimental effect for himself. The humour style presents the affiliative intentions by attracting the liking of the listener. "So that was a kind of humour, like not taking yourself so seriously, taking oneself for a ride...so in any case an acceptable kind of humour, a sympathetic kind" (ll.383 ff.).

Impact of humour on well-being and on anxiety symptoms

The exploration of the impact of humour on the listeners' well-being represents the second objective of the research project. In pursuance of the impact the focus groups were asked what the experiences with humour evoked in them. In placing the direct question: "In which way did this (humour style) positively/negatively affect your sense of well-being?" participants reacted predominantly confused and tended to raise a counter-question. For example, one participant said:*" What* kind of change in well-being do I associate with humour in a podcast like this?" (ll.897ff.). Hence, the opportunity to draw a direct connection between the perceived humour style and well-being mainly was not given. However, it was found that the different humour styles mainly had an indirect influence on their well-being. Furthermore, it has been found that some participants experience a reduction of anxiety complaints. Table 3 presents the findings, after which they will be described.

HUMOUR, PODCASTS AND WELL-BEING

Table 3

Impact of humour on well-being/anxiety

Style of humour	Effect on well-being/ anxiety reduction in general	Effect on well-being/anxiety reduction in general (frequencies)	Quote
affiliative	Amusement	Positively related to well-being: Positive emotions Positive relationships 9 times	"I was in the kitchen cleaning and often laughed while listening" (ll.405 ff.).
	Relief	Positively related to anxiety reduction 3 times	"I felt relieved by his manner" (ll.293 f.).
	Attentiveness	Positively related to well-being: Engagement 3 times	"Because I think that the funny anecdote put in there, helped to listen more attentively" (ll.272 ff.).
	Attentional disengagement	Negatively related to well-being: Engagement 2 times	"Sometimes I couldn't listen anymore because I thought oh no, now Atze is talking again and making his jokes" (ll.724ff.).
self-enhancing	Anxiety decrease/ Hope	Positively related to well-being/anxiety reduction: Anxiety reduction 2times Positive emotions 8 times	"Whereas Atze has taken away precisely these fears by saying here...so with his humorous way...um how can you embrace your fears and how can you take them up for yourself and reinterpret them positively" (ll.370 ff.).

	Distrust	Negatively related to well-being: Positive relationship 4 times	"Yes, he (Atze) talks in a funny way about his fear of becoming poor, but I would like to say that he has no reason to do so. He will probably not be in a situation where he has nothing tomorrow" (ll.314ff.).
self-defeating humour	Distrust	Negatively related to well-being: Positive relationship 1 time	"To ridicule one's own fear, isn't that also an escape?" (ll.833 ff.).
self-deprecating	Courage	Positively related to well-being/anxiety reduction: Positive relationships Meaning 4 times	"Atze, because he's more of a humour character...yes, his artificial character - I'm not afraid of him. I don't feel stupid in front of him either, because he already makes himself stupid" (ll.305 ff.).
	Hope /Inspiration	Positively related to well-being/anxiety reduction: Positive emotions 4 times	"It helped me because he did it in a funny way. He also made fun of himself and made his strengths smaller again [...] and it showed me that if he could do it, then I can do it too" (ll.274ff.).

Affiliative humour seemed to, directly and indirectly, influence participants' well-being, as it has been found that telling humorous stories and jokes within the podcast brings several benefits for the audience. Firstly, humour led to the amusement of participants provoking a physical response, namely laughter: "I laughed" (ll.405 f.). Amusement belongs to one of the ten core positive emotions in the PERMA model, resembling a direct connection to the emotional concept of well-being. In this context, participants found the story with the child on the leash most amusing, as Alice stated: "Well, I had to laugh at the leash scene" (ll.410 f.). Besides, it appeared that participants tended to laugh more often when they could create the humorous story situation inside their minds. Amra's quote demonstrates this proposition: "I

didn't have to laugh about the child and the leash, but about the other child who simply blows up in this situation. I have this other child in front of my eyes" (ll.413 ff.). In the end, the humorous, vivid stories seemed to specifically stimulate the imagination of the participants, provoking laughter in them, presumingly replacing thoughts on anxiety.

Furthermore, one participant mentioned the establishment of a connection between Atze and her through the amusement: "Because through laughter [...], I can then connect more, and with whom do I connect more?! I can then connect more easily with the person who expresses this humour…" (ll.440ff.). Hence, affiliative humour seems to serve the purpose of experiencing positive emotions and building a social bond with the speaker Atze Schröder.

Secondly, the incorporation of jokes and funny stories impacted the listeners' attentiveness and brought relief. Birgit for example, mentioned: "But I think that if these gags...yes, for me they were rather light relief so that the topic doesn't become too dry" (ll.733 ff.). Benedict confirmed her view:

> The mixture of people makes it more pleasant for me to listen to than if it were dryly broken down from one person to the next, or if it were just two people rattling off a theory, and I think I would lose attention after a relatively short time. He loosened it up a bit and gave it a lighter touch (ll.745ff.).

Considering both quotes, it seems reasonable to presume that affiliative humour acts as a moderator to transfer didactic knowledge for the anxiety disorder. Further, it was found that these gags not only serve to enlighten the participants regarding the topic but also the humour style also relieved tension in one participant as she said: "I felt relieved by his manner" (ll.210 f.).

In addition, the integration of the emotional stimulation realized through humour might motivate the participants to listen more attentively providing them with more knowledge about the disorder and its treatment. Likewise, being attentive implies that the listener is present in the moment, relating to one aspect of engagement, another element of the PERMA model. For

another participant, the affiliative humour provided access to more profound thoughts and induced an openness to confronting oneself with themes, which the individual might like to repress:" Oh, that was a funny scene, I have a picture in my head and through this entry, I then also get to deeper topics" (ll.252 ff.). Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that affiliative humour did not merely positively affect the audience. For example, Boris apparently felt annoyed by the humour style. He ended in a state of attentional disengagement, which is shown with his expression: "Sometimes I couldn't listen anymore because I thought oh no, now Atze is talking again and making his jokes" (ll.742 ff.). Attentional disengagement might deprive the participant of the chance to increase his knowledge about anxiety, his abilities to deal with anxiety and thus the experience of personal growth. It might leave him in an unchanged state of being. Therefore, it is negatively correlated with the elements of engagement and positive emotions. Concluding, affiliative humour did not entirely have positive effects on the listener.

The use of self-enhancing humour seemed to directly alleviate anxieties as it offers the speaker an opportunity to open up about experiences with anxieties while not overwhelming the receiver with its seriousness. Moreover, it offers an opportunity to convey a therapeutic approach humorously. In order to illustrate this proposition, Annabelle uttered: "...Atze has taken away precisely these fears by saying here...so with his humorous way...how can you embrace your fears and how can you take them up for yourself and reinterpret them positively" (ll.370 ff.). Building on this statement, she also said:"That was something I could totally relate to, because then I started to think about myself. What kind of situations do I avoid, or which are so unpleasant for me [...]or where do I have real fears and how can I embrace this fear?" (ll 286 ff.). These quotes demonstrated the use of benevolent humour. Eventually, this approach had a direct impact on Annabelle's perspective on her anxieties and it finally showed her a strategy for a positive reappraisal of adverse situations.

Consequently, the humour style appeared to induce the positive emotion of hope to plan for a better future without anxiety complaints. Likewise, the quote shows the element of

meaning in the PERMA model, as she integrated past, present and future. She seemed to understand the past experience with anxiety, drew meaning to the present, and pursued a goal for the future. She uttered the plan to implement a strategy against anxieties.

However, it seems that not everyone is positively affected by self-enhancing humour. For example, posing the question of how participants perceived coping humour, initially induced Benjamin to express his doubts about the trustworthiness of Atze´s presented fear of becoming impoverished. Not trusting Atze might impede the development of a relationship and is thus assumed to be negatively correlated with the element of positive relationships in the PERMA model.

Beyond that, he emphasised that humour has no place in serious and frightening situations: "When you have a real shattering fear, you don't joke about it or say something stupid about it, it's just the hardest thing for you to face at that moment" (ll. 843 ff.). He used the superlative "hardest" to emphasise the extreme of a frightening experience and he appeared to accuse Atze of his potential light-hearted humour in a serious situation. Finally, this quote emphasises an increase in negative emotions.

The perception of self-defeating humour might have had a negative impact on the well-being of one participant. The following statement points out that the respondent was unable to build a trusting relationship with the speaker, Atze Schröder: "To ridicule one's own fear, isn't that also an escape?" (l.833 f.). On the contrary, the statement shows a doubt about Atze's own coping strategy and indicates that the speaker's competence is not confident. This in turn, could prevent the respondent from feeling secure, presumingly reinforcing the feeling of fear. For this reason, self-enhancing humour seemed to have a negative effect on well-being and anxiety.

The passive consumption of self-deprecating humour probably had a positive impact on anxiety symptoms. It appeared to relate to three of the five core elements of the PERMA model, namely positive relationships, meaning, and positive emotions. Several participants expressed that they could build a connection with Atze. In particular, Atze's manner of humorously

undervaluing himself provided an advantage in winning the audience's sympathies. "Atze says quite openly that he has a fear of impoverishment. He doesn't buy the Rolex, but the Karstadt watch, which I also found very funny...I had to laugh and thought: What an old and cool guy…" (ll.314ff.). In addition, the perceived humour style appeared to relate to the two other elements of the PERMA model. First of all, it provided one participant with the courage to express parts of her identity, which relates to the fourth element of the PERMA model, namely meaning. Secondly, it evoked an openness and thus interest in new information relating to positive emotions. This proposition is visible in Amra's statement:

> I, for example, feel stupid very quickly. Really stupid...and when someone with a lot of super knowledge approaches me and gives me such a great lecture...then I feel small. It has nothing to do with the person in front of me, it has something to do with me.... Atze, because he's more of a humour character...yes, his artificial character - I'm not afraid of him. I don't feel stupid in front of him either because he already makes himself stupid. His character is stupid...and that's why I can listen to him much more openly…(ll.302ff.).

Benedict confirmed her perception. Probably individuals felt less intimidated while listening to Atze. In addition, self-deprecating humour induced the positive emotions of hope and inspiration for personal growth in Anne. "It helped me because he did it in a funny way. He also made fun of himself and made his strengths smaller again [...] and it showed me that if he could do it, then I can do it too" (ll.276 ff.). In conclusion, this style of humour seemed to relate to three core components of the PERMA model.

Discussion

General remarks

The present research study had two main research objectives. First of all, it aimed at exploring the experience of humour in a self-help podcast. Secondly, it tried to shed light on

the impact of humour on well-being in listeners with anxiety complaints. For this purpose, the self-help podcast "Betreutes Fühlen" was chosen as an appropriate medium.

Surprisingly, the findings revealed that humour was not primarily associated by the participants with the presented podcast, as they focused their attention mainly on the scientific evidence which the podcast provided. This shows that humour played a minor role in the experience with the podcast episodes in general. A possible explanation for why humour played a minor role is due to the intensity of humour or the subject matter of anxiety that suppressed primary attention towards humour. It could be argued that the listeners attached their attention to the science-related information on self-help rather than to humour as it confirmed their beliefs about what a self-help podcast intends (Peters, 2020). Concerning scientific presentation of information, previous studies have already shown that seriously presenting health information can induce fear and lead to the rejection of corresponding messages in the receiver (Schwarz & Reifegerste, 2019). The present study confirms this view insofar as several participants mentioned an increase of fear and rejection of Stephanie Stahl's scientific contribution. In contrast, humour showed to play a moderating role in creating a non-threatening atmosphere, which is of great value for communication and even clinical therapy (Janes & Olsen, 2010) as being shown in this study as well.

Different humour styles with different effects

The findings suggest that the different humour styles perceived in the podcast impacted emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Still, emotional well-being seemed most frequently affected. In addition, symptoms of anxiety seemed to mitigate while participants listened to the podcast.

First of all, affiliative humour appeared to primarily serve the purpose to amuse participants and make them laugh. As already mentioned, amusement belongs to one of the ten positive emotions and thus belongs to emotional well-being (Fredrickson, 2011). In addition laughter seemed beneficial to anxiety mitigation in participants. Apart from the saying "laughter

is the best medicine" there is indeed scientific evidence that laughter has at least short-term positive effects on anxiety (Papousek, 2018). Strick and others (2009) suggest that the cognitive incongruity-resolution process during the processing of humour and laughter requires attentional resources that inhibit focusing on negative emotions, such as anxiety (Strick et al., 2009), eventually leading to less experience with anxiety. Furthermore, the "facial feedback theory" can also help to explain why laughter has positive effects on emotional well-being because it is based on the assumption that changing the facial expression to a smile changes the way individuals feel (Kassin et al., 2016).

Notably, affiliative humour seemed to be a good catalysator for the formation of social bonds. Research suggests that human beings desire to feel connected and be part of a community (Martino et al.,2015; Ryan and Deci, 2001). Affiliative humour might have satisfied this need, as it has been shown that through the generated laughter which is a physical response of positive emotions in participants, might have established a feeling of connection. With respect to the broaden and build theory, the positive emotion of amusement might have broadened the thought in the participant, aroused the action repertoire of laughter, and helped build the resource of a social connection (Fredrickson, 2001). Social connection in turn is an essential factor for the individual's social well-being (Martino et al., 2015).

Moreover, it has been found that affiliative humour attracted listeners' attention. In light of prior findings, attention reflects a valuable and scarce resource (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2010). Individuals need attention to be engaged in activities (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2010). Although the study cannot provide sufficient evidence that participants experienced effortless attention associated with engagement, findings give rise to the idea that directing one's attention to something amusing can account for a positive experience enhancing the participant's quality of life. In a similar vein James, (as cited in Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2010) (1980) that "the quality of our lives depends on the habits of attention we cultivate moment by moment".

Furthermore, the findings of this study seem to prove the impact of affiliative humour in podcasts dealing with topics like anxiety. Affiliative humour has been shown to help alleviate tense situations and make unpleasant topics more pleasant, thus confirming other studies (e.g., Tissot, 2009). Beyond this finding, the study also revealed that affiliative humour supports individuals in accessing difficult and emotionally charged themes. This confirms the findings of Dionigi and Canestrari (2018) who investigated whether humour in psychotherapy is profitable for the client (Dionigi & Canestrari, 2018).

However, studies found that integrating humour into critical message content inducing the associated positive affect in individuals can impair a person's ability to process new information (Nabi et al., 2017). This finding would imply that though the audience enjoyed listening to the podcast, the informative parts, such as, for example, how to deal with anxiety, failed to reach it, resulting in a lack of learning experience.

Besides, it has been found that the perception of self-enhancing humour positively influenced the listener. This finding is in line with the research of Martin and others (2003) who claimed that self-enhancing humour is benign to others and the self (Martin et al., 2003). Further research suggests that using self-enhancing humour can mitigate anxiety in the user (Mendelez-Aller et al., 2019). This research paper substantiated and extended this view, as it has been found that just listening to a person using self-enhancing humour for dealing with his or her anxiety issues can relieve anxiety in the perceiver. Further, it can be considered that this humour style provides the listener with another perspective of an adverse and distressing event enabling him or her to cope with a difficult situation (Goldin & Bordan, 1999; Crawford & Calbatino, 2011). This shows that the perception of self-enhancing humour benefits the audience so that it can be considered to serve as a suitable approach for cognitive restructuring.

Notably, this study has revealed an additional style of humour, namely self-deprecating humour. This style of humour is found to be positively correlated with self-esteem, self-efficacy, and psychological well-being (Brown et al., 2019). The perception of self-deprecating

humour touched upon three of five core components of the PERMA model, namely positive emotions, positive relationships, and meaning (Seligman, 2011). The advantage of self-deprecating humour becomes apparent in the building of a relationship at equal footing between the speaker and the audience (Meyer, 2000; Lee et al., 2015). Thereby the listener could take advantage because the message conveyed through this style of humour is perceived as less threatening (Lee et al., 2015), inducing greater hope for a future without anxiety complaints. However, the dataset does not indicate whether the participants' sense of hope persisted outside the group and after the end of the podcast. In terms of science hope may have lasted only for a short time, as positive emotions are only of a short duration (Frederikson, 2001).

With regard to the element of meaning, the perceived humour style induced participants to foreclosure aspects of their personal identity in the focus group discussion. Embracing one´s identity has been shown to positively influence well-being (Barreto et al., 2006 as cited in Moradi et al., 2019). Firstly, it shows that the individual possesses a sense of self (Morton & Sonnenberg, 2011). Secondly, it shows the trust in the individual to stay respected and accepted by other group members even after disclosure of their own deficits/fears (Morton &Sonnenberg, 2011). Self-deprecating humour might have induced self-reflection concerning social identity and bravery to disclosure.

Finally, this study confirms that using humour also entails risks, as it might undermine the credibility of information and capability to process it, which has also been shown in former studies (Pinto & Riesch, 2017; Pinto et al., 2013). Considering self-deprecating humour, this study confirms its detriment for the listener's impression of the presenter's reliability (Andeweg et al., 2011). With regard to well-being, the lack of trust in the speaker might have inhibited the building of interpersonal trust and relationships in individuals. However, these seem important to experience social well-being (Martínez et al., 2019).

Interestingly, prior research of Andeweg and others (2011) has found that self-deprecating humour might entail the risk that the audience will lose interest. This finding could

not be confirmed with this study. However, this study found that self-affiliative humour might lead to similar disadvantages, as it might lead to attentional disengagement. Attentional disengagement gives reason to assume that the individual will not be intrinsically (Ryan and Deci, 2001) motivated to listen to the podcast. This in turn stops the individual's personal development, inhibiting personal growth and, thus, psychological well-being (Bohlmeijer & Hulsbergen,2018).

In addition, this study revealed that humour in serious topics was not well-received by everyone. This finding is in line with other research findings indicating that humour appreciation depends on factors such as the communication situation, cultural capital resources, and audience type (Pinto & Riesch, 2017; Friedman, 2014).

Study's strengths and limitations

A unique strength of this research study lies in the fact that it is one of the first attempts to investigate the role of humour in podcasts and its impacts on listeners' well-being. This study thus sets a starting point for future research on humour in podcasts. Another strength lies in the great versatility of participants, as other social science studies rely largely on experimental setups with highly educated individuals (Pollet & Saxton, 2019). It was fundamental to this study to open participation to anyone who experienced anxiety symptoms, regardless of education and sociodemographic status. In this way, it was possible to show where similarities and discrepancies in the experience of listening to a humorous self-help podcast in different age groups and socio-economic statuses occurred.

Despite the study's strengths, several limitations have to be taken into consideration. To begin with, the method of working with focus groups needs critical reflection. The researcher decided to employ focus groups instead of conducting in-depth interviews as the present study sought to find out what experiences were made with humorous elements in self-help podcasts. The employment of focus groups is deemed an appropriate method to collect new information. However, they also limit the opportunity for an in-depth understanding of the individual's

experience with the podcast as it limits the accurate assessment of personal and sensitive topics (Maheshwari, 2019). Secondly, one should be aware that the group dynamic in the discussion can immensely influence the foreclosure of single individuals. Individuals feeling suppressed by dominant members will hold back valuable information within the group (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Additionally, the convenience sampling method is not without limitations and is indeed inferior to snowball sampling, as it might be more valuable to compose a focus group with individuals unknown to each other (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). There are two main reasons for it: First of all, the disclosure of individuals known to each other might be inhibited by pre-existing relationships and expectations of group members (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Secondly, focus groups composed of family and friends might lead to "group-think", leading the discussion in only one direction.

Another downside of the study regards the quantitative measurement of anxiety reduction. The researcher requested the participants to fill out the GAD-7 before listening to the podcast. However, individuals were not required to fill out the GAD-7 after listening to the podcast. Hence, the paper lacks quantitative post-measurement examining the effects of listening to the podcast. Next, the findings on the elements of the PERMA model appear too overrated and cannot be understood in a broad sense.

In addition, the choice of the podcast "Betreutes Fühlen" cannot be considered free from shortcomings. This is because the link that listeners draw with the art figure of Atze Schröder known from the comedy sitcom "Alles Atze" biased their experience with him in the podcast. In the sitcom, he took over the role of a boastful and manly car fan with a perm hair wig, blue-tinted glasses, and too-tight jeans. Presumingly this artificial figure is not associated with much profundity. However, in the podcast, Atze Schröder, shows himself as a humorous person who is literate and has depth (Leon-Windscheid). Hence, the podcast is not to be equated with a comedy performance but a humorous portrayal of human fears and coping. Ultimately, the phenomenon of confirmation bias is evident in this study. Listeners having prior experience

with him from his former comedy shows displayed the tendency to seek information that confirmed their already existing beliefs (Kassin et al., 2016), which consequently biased subsequent experience with him in the context of "Betreutes Fühlen".

Last but not least, participants seemed to primarily appreciate the podcast's scientific foundation instead of valuing its humorous aspects. Interestingly, prior research has shown that individuals suffering from anxiety exhibit an inability to divert their attention from neutral information (Verkuil et al., 2009). This finding raises the fundamental question of whether the individuals suffering from anxiety complaints are receptive enough to appreciate humour in connection with scientific information dealing with their complaints.

Conclusion

To conclude, this thesis shows some evidence that, with due regard to the limitations mentioned, humour in self-help podcasts can impact the listener's well-being and anxiety symptoms. In particular, it has been found that humour might increase positive emotions inducing a sense of emotional well-being. It might initiate a sense of connectedness, speaking for social well-being and providing people with meaning, leading to better psychological well-being. All these elements of well-being seem crucial factors to diminish and protect against mental illness symptoms, like anxiety symptoms.

Scientific studies replicating the study and thereby considering the limitations should follow to further explore the use of humour in podcasts. To put it more precisely, future research should concentrate on building up focus groups with individuals not known to each other to limit the risk of receiving adjusted responses, limit under or over disclosure, and hinder harmful group dynamics (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Concerning the focus group discussion, future studies should try to start the discussion immediately after participants listened to the podcast episodes. In this way, the participants' memory is less biased, and experiences and first impressions are more present. Moreover, the integration of both pre and post-measurement of

anxiety symptoms would support the examination of the effect of humour on anxiety in the self-help podcast.

The question of why humour places a minor role in the experience with the podcast remains open. It gives rise to the idea that individuals suffering from anxiety may potentially put a greater focus on neutral information. Hence, future research should further elucidate whether the appreciation of humour depends on anxiety symptoms. Moreover, future research should focus on the factors that influence humour appreciation, with a specific focus on quantity and quality.

Lastly, further research should also explore the long-term consequences of listening to podcasts. So far, it has not been adequately addressed whether listening to a podcast with humorous elements has positive long-term implications for the individual.

Despite all remaining open questions, the thesis has shown that the use of humorous podcasts has a still far underestimated potential.

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Appendix A
PERMA model-elements

Positive emotions. Positive emotions belong to the emotional well-being h. This element includes ten different positive emotions such as joy, amusement, and interest. (Fredrickson, 2001). Positive emotions lead to broader perceptions, an increased sense of connectedness and enhanced creativity (Fredrickson, 2001; Bohlmeijer & Hulsbergen,2018). It seems worth mentioning that positive emotions can exclusively be measured subjectively and not be proven wrong (Seligman, 2011).

Engagement. Engagement belongs to psychological well-being. Just like the previous element, engagement can only be measured subjectively and retrospectively (Seligman, 2011). Central to this element is the "flow-state" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2001). The flow state arises when an individual is absorbed in an activity that is intrinsically rewarding. It is also characterised by high concentration and loss of sense of time (Bohlmeijer & Hulsbergen,2018).

Positive relationships. This element has been integrated into the model based on the idea that humans are innately social beings (Seligman, 2011). Relationships, for example, include family and circles of friends, trust in and from other(s), support for and from others and love (Seligman, 2011). Although each PERMA element is defined and measured independently of the other, in most situations where joy is shared, meaning is felt or success is achieved, the presence of other people comprises an important factor (Seligman, 2011). Hence, this element illustrated the high correlation between the elements.

Meaning. In the PERMA model this element focuses on the subjective view. Meaning implies that something has personal value for the self (Seligman, 2011). Meaning is about expressing one's self and about one's personal identity. It is as much past, present and future orientiert. Meaning should not be confused with happiness (Baumeister et al. 2013).

Accomplishment. Accomplishment is understood as a subjectively perceived achievment.

These include the mastery of goals, competence, and self-efficiency (Butler & Kern, 2013).

Appendix B.

Interview schedule

Table 4

Introductory questions

Introductory questions + experience	1. How did you experience the podcast "Betreutes Fühlen"?
	2. What did you feel during and after the podcast?
Probes	● Could you explain further? ● I do not understand what you mean. ● Would you like to give an example?

Table 5

Concepts from Martin's model of humour (Martin et al.,2003) and questions used in the focus group

Concept & operationalisation	Questions for focus group

Affiliative humour: Making jokes and telling funny stories to others. It is used to improve interpersonal relationships. It is not about insulting others in the process of joke-telling.
- Adaptive humour style.

Which funny stories did you notice? (If not mentioned by the group itself).

In which way did this positive/negatively affect your sense of well-being/anxiety

Self-enhancing humour: Coping humour. Remaining a positive outlook in difficult situations. A form of tension relives.
- Adaptive humour style.

Which coping humour did you notice?

In which way did this positive/negatively affect your sense of well-being/anxiety?

Self-defeating humour:

Amusing others by doing or saying amusing things at one's own expense.
- Maladaptive humour style

Which self-defeating humour did you notice? (If not mentioned by the group itself).

In which way did this positive/negatively affect your sense of well-being / anxiety?

Aggressive humour: Making fun of others in ridicule and mean ways to threaten or psychologically harm others.
- Maladaptive humour style

Which aggressive humour did you notice? (If not mentioned by the group itself).

In which way did this positive/negatively affect your sense of well-being / anxiety?

Appendix C.

Story: Child on the leash

Leon: "Watch out, everything is full to bursting, so Corona doesn't feel like it's there because everyone wants to go for a walk. What else are we supposed to do, and they all walk around with their fancy Fendi and Gucci and I don't know what kind of branded cups. I'm in the middle of it, hopefully still looking somewhat normal... and then a mother came with her

child. The child was well over 6. It wasn't quite little now. The child was on a horse harness as a leash but is not as a game as funny but really so to keep this child under control, so on a meter and a half.

Atze: Yes, I know you told that during our walk together. Significantly, it happened on the leinpfad by the Alster. I just kept my mouth shut because I thought I didn't want to discuss it in this group, but it's good that you're talking about it again, we must discuss it here. It's cool that we were walking along the leinpfad (...) but a child, yes, well, exactly. So, this child was leashed, and everyone was so irritated except this mother who just did her thing.

Atze: I'm not irritated either, but that's ok.

Leon: I was really irritated and now watch out: Another child came, a little fat boy. We all saw him licking an ice cream like that and he had it all over his face. He was really full of vanilla ice cream. His grandmother at this metre behind him is walking, mind you, without a leash and says and I'm trying now do you want to talk to him what has said ohhaaa someone has his child on a leash already this ohhaaa spoke to everyone from the soul sometimes children are able to say exactly what everyone thinks and you really thought the boy thank you for saying that and hopefully it gives this mother to think because who has his child on a leash, why doesn't that irritate you?