



## Students' humor styles and its use in stress coping

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### Abstract:

The article shows the results of studying of role of students' humor styles during coping the stress<sup>1</sup>. It was shown the positive and negative humor styles regarding the interpersonal relationship. It was revealed some differences in use of humor styles during coping the stress among students of Ukrainian and Russian samples; among girls and youngers. The statistically significant correlations between students' use of humor style and indexes of stress coping were calculated, which show that coping the stress students use negative for the relationship humor styles (aggressive humor and self-defeating humor). At the same time, the potential possibilities of affiliative humor to improve the relationship are used not enough during coping the stress both by the youngers and girls. While potential possibilities of affiliative humor to improve the relationship are used not enough during coping the stress both by the youngers and girls.

## 1. Introduction

A number of studies indicates the possibility to use humor in stressful situations in order to overcome them, to go out of critical situations (Дмитриев, Сычев, 2005; Abel, 2002; Zayvaya, Nosenko, 2004; Kuiper and Martin, 1998; Martin, 1996; Scheier, Carver, et al., 1985).

Most researchers say that humor improves the physical condition of the person, relieves stress, creates a sense of satisfaction, promotes relaxation, enhancing the protective function, viability (Фоминова, 2012; Freud, 1959; Fredrickson, 2001; Krichtafovich, 2005; Scheier, Carver, et al., 1985). At the same time it was found the ambiguous humor impact on interpersonal relationships (Белова, 2012; Дмитриев, Сычев, 2005; Yip, Martin, 2006; Шейнов, 2015). Because of different modalities of the role of humor it is evident the existence of positive and negative kinds (styles) of humor (Kirsh, Kuiper, 2003; Kuiper, Martin, 2007). Humor is a personality's tool, a means of expression and its role depends on the goals which personality sets. Kinds of humor constitute the arsenal of means by which personality builds her or his behavior aimed to achieve the goal. The factor that determines the personality's choice of a particular type of humor, and, consequently, its role in interpersonal relationships, are the motives for which a person uses humor. In cases where the motives are determined by the desire to humiliate, to offend, to hurt the other person, humor serves as a tool to achieve these goals, which in turn negatively affect interpersonal relationships.

The range of different motives of use of humor defines personality styles of humor. Martin et al. (2003) proposed to allocate the affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive and self-defeating styles of humor. Every

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personality is characterized by a greater or lesser extent of all styles of humor, but usually there is one (rarely two) leading style which he/she uses mostly.

Affiliative style of humor having a positive effect on interpersonal relationships is associated with kindness, tolerance, increases the attractiveness of communication.

Self-enhancing style of humor expresses optimism, good health, the vitality, the absence of complaints and whining in communication, which is also positive for the relationship.

Aggressive style of humor is determined by the desire to show her/his superiority, dominance, is connected with humiliation of others. It expresses dissatisfaction, tension, threat that is perceived negatively in communication.

The aspiration to expose him/herself in a funny situations, exhilarating other people, is main characteristic of self-defeating style of humor. Such humor expresses personality's subservience, flattery, subordination, uncertainty and anxiety. Therefore, behind it are negative emotions that destroys relationships.

It was revealed that positive humor styles have positive impact to some types of social abilities and components of emotional intelligence. Negative humor styles have bad impact to other interpersonal competencies. Thus, the absence of negative humor styles may be just as important as the presence of positive styles in social competence and emotional intelligence (Yip, Martin, 2006). The study conducted by Иванова et al. (2013) shows that there are association of the adaptive styles of humor with the constructive coping strategies and the quality of life, as well as the negative correlation of maladaptive styles of humor with the indicators of aggression.

Numerous studies prove the effectiveness of the use of humor in coping stress (Artemyeva, 2013; Zayvaya, Nosenko, 2004; Scheier, Carver, 1985). Therefore, using humor the personality overcomes stress more easily and quickly, copes with the psycho-physiological problems, restores the normal functioning of the body. However, if we take into account the ambiguous humor impact on the other people and relationships with them, we can presuppose that the use of certain styles of humor helps to overcome stress but at the same time may spoil relations with others. We are talking about situations where personality have successfully coped with stress, but humor used in this process is of a nature which causes the deterioration of his relations and becomes a source of new stresses. Therefore, some styles of humor helps to cope with the stress but simultaneously provokes the emergence of new ones.

The studies conducted by Abel (1998), Fry (1995), Lampert, Ervin-Tripp (2007) prove the gender differences in the use of humor.

With this in mind, it is important to study the question of what is the contribution of the different styles of humor in personality's stress coping.

The aim of the article is to present the results of the study of a number of next issues. What styles of humor are students used usually in the process of coping with stress? Are there cases when students use negative for relations humor styles to cope with stress or students use to cope only the so-called positive humor styles? Do students choose all humor styles to cope with stress with equal frequency, or the frequency depends on the role of humor style for relations? If we could divide the humor styles on often used and rarely used to cope with stress? Are there gender differences in what youngers and girls use humor styles in coping with stress?

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Participants

The study was conducted during 2015-2016 with 286 students (160 girls and 126 youngers) aged 21-23 years in Kamyanyets-Podilskyi Ivan Ohienko National University, Ukraine.

### 2.2. Procedure and Measures

It was used „Humor Styles Questionnaire” (HSQ) by R. Martin (adaptation Иванова, et al., 2013; Зайва, 2005) and „The Coping humor scale” (CHS) by R. Martin and G.Lefkort (adaptation Артемьева, 2011; Зайва, 2005). The both methodologies were adapted on the Ukrainian sample by Зайва (2005), which proved their reliability, validity and internal consistency, proving the suitability for further use in psychological research.



### 3. Results

Students' answers to the questions of HSQ allow to determine the average index of each of the humor styles. In our sample, the affiliative humor dominates at girls (average on a scale – 32.4), the self-enhancing humor dominates at youngers (33.1). Self-enhancing humor takes the second place among girls (31.5), and affiliative humor takes the second place at youngers (31.0). Aggressive humor take the third place both at girls and youngers (respectively 27.9 and 29.0). The average index of self-defeating humor is very similar at girls and youngers (22.6 and 22.5 respectively) and is situated on the fourth place.

We compared our results with the results of students in the Russian sample (Table 1), obtained by Иванова et al (2013).

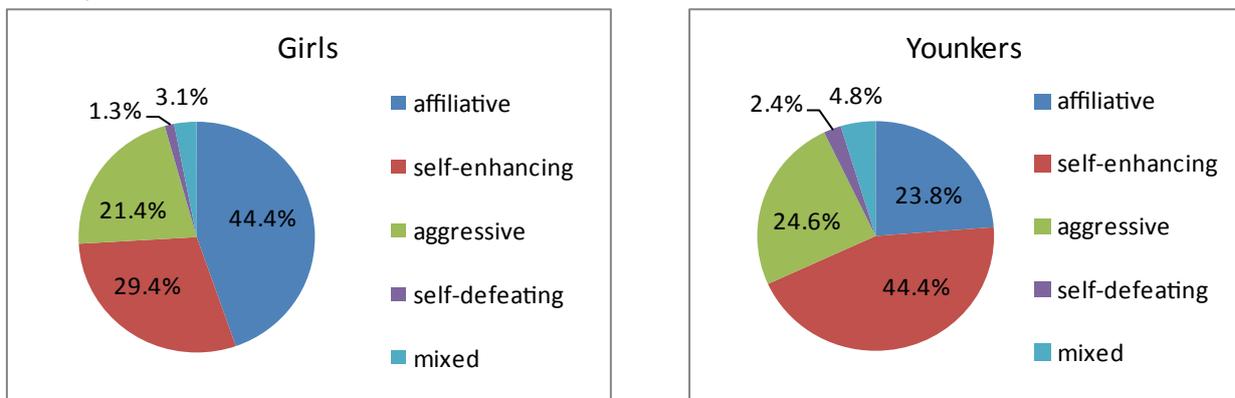
**Table 1.** The distribution of the average indexes of the humor styles on the Ukrainian and Russian (Иванова et al.) samples of students

Humor styles	Ukrainian sample (n=286)		Russian sample (n=604)	
	Girls	Youngers	Girls	Youngers
affiliative	32.4	31.0	35.3	37.6
self-enhancing	31.5	33.1	34.1	34.8
aggressive	27.9	29.0	28.7	33.2
self-defeating	22.6	22.5	28.0	28.7
The total average value	28.6	28.9	31.5	33.6

Russian students have higher averages indexes of all humor styles. The total average value of all humor styles shows the overall level of use of humor by students. The girls of the Ukrainian sample have 28.6 points of this figure, while the Russian girls have 31.5 points; youngers, respectively, 28.9 and 33.6 points. As you can see, the overall use of humor is higher at Russian students. The difference between girls and youngers in the use of humor in the Ukrainian sample is less significant (0.3 points) than in Russian (2.1 point). The sequence of percentage of each of the humor styles at girls and youngers in the Russian sample is the same (affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, self-defeating humor). In the Ukrainian sample affiliative humor style prevails at girls and self-enhancing humor at youngers.

Each student has one or two humorous style that prevail over the other. If a student has two or more humor styles with the same average value, such a style we have designated as mixed.

Figure 1. shows, that 44.4% of girls use predominantly affiliative humor style. 44.4% of youngers show self-enhancing humor style. The second place is occupied by self-enhancing humor style at girls (29.3%) and by aggressive humor style at youngers (24.6%). The third place is occupied by style at girls (21.9%) and by affiliative at youngers (23.8%).



**Figure 1.** Distribution (%) of prevailing humor style (s) at students

The results of the CHS is presented in the table 2. It shows that the girls of Russian sample (data of Артемьева, 2011) more actively use humor in dealing with stress than youngers (average indexes 21.4 and 20.4, respectively).



**Table 2.** Average indexes of CHS in the Ukrainian and Russian (Артемьева, 2011) samples of students

Point of assessment	Ukrainian sample (n=286)			Russian sample (n=270)		
	girls	youngsters	all sample	girls	youngsters	all sample
stress coping	18.9	20.0	19.5	21.4	20.4	20.9
using humor						

Ukrainian youngsters, on the contrary, more actively use humor in dealing with stress than girls (average indexes 20.0 and 18.9, respectively). Note also that in the total Ukrainian sample students use humor a bit more passive, than the Russian students (average indexes 19.5 and 20.9, respectively).

Next step was to assess the relationship between indexes received by students in HSQ and in CHS. The nature of this relationship helps to answer what humor styles are used by students most often in the process of coping.

**Table 3.** Spearman correlation coefficients between students' HSQ and CHS indexes

Humor style	girls	youngsters
affiliative	0.175	0.179
self-enhancing	0.459**	0.418**
aggressive	0.237*	0.244*
self-defeating	0.164	0.283**

Legend: \* – statistical significance at the 0.05 level; \*\* – statistical significance at the 0.01 level.

Overcoming stress girls most frequently use self-enhancing humor style (remp = 0.459; 0.01 level of significance), as well as quite often use aggressive humor style (remp = 0.237; 0.05 level of significance). Indexes of affiliative and self-defeating humor styles have no significant correlation with the use of humor for coping by girls, therefore don't play a significant role in coping.

Coping with stress youngsters most frequently as do girls use self-enhancing humor style (remp = 0.418; 0.01 level of significance) and aggressive humor style (remp = 0.244; 0.05 level of significance), but, unlike the girls, they more actively use self-defeating humor style (remp = 0.283; 0.01 level of significance). So affiliative humor style doesn't play a significant role in overcoming the stress by youngsters.

Thus, when coping with stress, both youngsters and girls use mostly self-enhancing and aggressive style of humor, only boys are actively using self-defeating humor style. Affiliative humor style doesn't play a significant role in coping regardless of student's gender.

## 4. Discussion

Active use of aggressive and self-defeating humor styles to cope with stress shows poor prognosis for students' relationships with others, which can provoke stress situations in the future. There is a reason to consider the way to cope with stress using a "negative" for the relationship humor styles as unproductive.

It was revealed some differences in HSQ and CHS indexes among students of Ukrainian and Russian samples. In general, Ukrainian students are less actively use humor to cope with stress, and have a slightly different structure of sequence of predominating styles of humor. In contrast to the Russian students, Ukrainian youngsters use self-enhancing humor more often than other styles.

The statistically significant correlations between students' HSQ and CHS indexes were calculated, which show that coping the stress students use negative for the relationship humor styles (aggressive humor and self-defeating humor). The way out of stress using a „negative” style of humor is designated as unproductive. Our results show that both girls and youngsters use unproductive ways to cope with the stress. However, the youngsters more actively than girls use humor styles which affects the relationship.

At the same time, the potential possibilities of affiliative humor to improve the relationship are used not enough during coping the stress both by the youngsters and girls.



## 5. Conclusions

Identified style and gender characteristics indicate the need for correction, aimed at enhancing the students' positive humor styles and easing negative when they are used for coping. Next step of this study is to verify empirically our presupposition that the use of certain styles of humor helps to overcome stress but at the same time may spoil relations with others. Do the students with dominating „negative” humor styles have worse relations than students with dominating “positive” humor styles?

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