

## The study of optimism and positive self-concept of students

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### Abstract

*The phenomenon of the optimism is aimed at the disclosure of personal and professional human capacities, providing adaptive human interaction with the world and himself, but investigated fragmentary and not always included in the solution of actual life problems of human. The psychological nature, structure and relationship with other mental formations, the "self-concept" remain unrevealed. This becomes especially important in early adulthood, studenthood, when the system of self-concepts and capabilities forms. Humor has been considered as a component of optimism. The empirical study involved a set of methods such as "Personal differential", Purpose-in-Life test (D. Crumbaugh, L. Maholick), a modified questionnaire of J. Rotter's Locus of Control Scale, "The coping humor scale", and "Situational Humor Response Questionnaire" by R. Martin. It was found that optimistic students (high rates of CHS and SHRQ) estimate their process of life to be interesting, emotionally rich ( $r = 0.684$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ) and meaningful ( $r = 0.435$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ); have sufficient freedom of choice, purposeful behavior ( $r = 0.885$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ); have adequate self-esteem ( $r = 0.669$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ); tend to perceive themselves as a carrier of positive, socially desirable characteristics ( $r = 0.768$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ); have a high level of self-control ( $r = 0.576$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ). The study suggests that the use of humor is largely determined by life orientation, self-esteem of students and complements the data obtained by foreign psychologists. Results of the study can be used in practical work with students, in the organization of and during the trainings of personal development.*

**Keywords:** students, Self-concept, self-esteem, life goals, subjective control, optimism, humor.

## Introduction

At the present stage of social development it is obvious that priority should be given to humanitarian research aimed at finding the adaptive capacity of modern human and the resource of his personal and professional success. An insight into the history of the study of optimism shows that this phenomenon was investigated fragmentary and not always included in the solution of urgent life problems of a particular person (Posokhova, 2009). The psychological nature, structure and relationship with other mental formations, the "self-concept" remain unrevealed. Optimism defines the perception of the world and the vector of human behavior (Kothe de Vries 2009). As a component of optimism the humor has been considered (Posokhova, 2009), which is the ability to find a discrepancy between the expected, stereotypical human behavior and the perfect actions, between the established self-concepts and actual behavior, and thus actualize the positive experiences and laughter. This ensures an adaptive human interaction with the world and himself (Tsvil'skaya, 2015), as the adverse events appear in a very different, less tragic light.

Humor used in critical situations is often an important mean of maintaining the group cohesion and moral spirit, saving the feeling of superiority, hope and self-respect (Martin, 2003); it is considered as an important emotion regulation mechanism that contributes to the promotion of mental health (Fredrickson, 2001). The use of humor in education, management, and advertising is the most keenly discussed question (Ivanova, 2006).

The studies (Artemyeva, 2013) revealed that the scores on the coping humor scale positively correlate with a high adaptability to the environment, self-confidence, focus on the surrounding people, and sociability. Students with high scores on the coping humor scale are more active, sociable, self-confident, independent, tend to rely on their own resources in difficult situations.

Laughter makes a person more charming and attractive for communication, provides additional opportunities for optimism. A sense of humor and ability to understand the jokes are considered a sign of a healthy person with a developed intellect; witty ideas and opinions are highly valued in science and everyday communication. The ability to joke and experience a frivolous state has a positive effect on the development of creativity and communication skills. On the contrary, excessive seriousness and standartization of life can lead to human neuroticism. Loss of the ability to understand the ridiculous is often a sign of intellectual or personal dysfunction (Martin, 2009).

The personal attitude to the own actions, the actions of others, the formation of positive or negative system of self-concepts, and life-purpose orientations are determined by the system of human self-concepts (Rogers, 2001, 2013). The period of early adulthood is characterized by the completed formation of the "Self-concept", which expresses the unity and integrity of the individual. Positive "Self-concept" is described with a positive attitude toward oneself, self-esteem, self-acceptance, a sense of self-worth (Kolyadin, 2005; Nigmatullina, 2015).

Objective of our research was to study experimentally the characteristics of a sense of humor and "Self-concept" of students, as well as to identify the relationships between them.

## Methods

### *Participants*

The study involved 50 students of Kazan Federal University at the age of 19-22 years, 35 girls and 15 boys. Participation in the study was on voluntary basis.

### *Research questions*

We assumed that the students able to understand humor and actively using humor in different situations have higher level of self-esteem and a more stable and harmonious "Self-concept".

*Materials*

1. Purpose-life orientation test (an adapted version of Purpose-in-Life Test, PIL by D.Crumbaugh and L. Maholick) allows determining the strength of the motivational tendencies to search for the meaning of life, life goals, the degree of both life meaningfulness and responsibility for the own life (Leontiev, 2000).
2. The method of personal differential (a variant adapted by V.M. Bekhterev Research Institute) provides information about the subjective aspects of the subject's attitude to oneself or to others (Fetiskin, 2002).
3. The questionnaire of "Subjective Control Level" (SCL) by E.F. Bazhin, E.A. Golykin, L.M. Etkind is a modified variant of a questionnaire by American psychologist J. Rotter. It helps to assess the level of subjective control over a variety of situations, in other words, to determine the degree of person's responsibility for his/her actions and life (Rean, 2001).
4. The coping humor scale (HCS) by R. Martin and G. Lefcourt is designed to measure the degree of use of humor by people when coping with stress (Martin, 1996; Artemyeva, 2013).
5. The Situational Humor Response Questionnaire (SHRQ) by R. Martin and G. Lefcourt is a list of questions that briefly describe the various situations (positive and negative). For each of these, the respondents had to assess the extent and frequency they usually laugh and smile with in variable situations (Martin, 1996).

**Results***The students' life-purpose orientations*

To study the "Self-concept" of students we used the "Purpose-life orientation" method that allows determining the strength of the motivational tendencies to search for the meaning of life, life goals, the degree of both life meaningfulness and responsibility for the own life. The results obtained are shown in Table 1.

Scores on "Purpose-in-life" scale characterize the presence or absence of the future goals in the test subject's life, which make life meaningful, give it orientation and time perspective.

The content of the scale "Process or life interest and emotional richness of life" coincides with the well-known theory that the only meaning of life is to live.

Scores on the scale of "Effectiveness of life or self-realization satisfaction" express an assessment of the passed stage of life, a sense of level of its productivity and meaningfulness.

The scale of "Locus of control - I (I - master of life)" and the scale of "Locus of control - life or life controllability" reflect the view of the test subjects on themselves as a strong personality, with sufficient freedom of choice to build their lives in accordance with their goals and perceptions about its meaning.

Table 1

Students' life-purpose orientation levels

Scales of	Levels, %	
	High	Middle
Life-purpose orientation method		
Purpose in life	94	6
Interest and emotional richness of life	90	10
Self-realization satisfaction	90	10
Locus of control - I (I - a master of life)	82	18
Locus of control - life controllability	94	6

Thus, the results suggest that the majority of the sampled students is goal-oriented, evaluates their lives as interesting, emotionally rich and full of meaning, and seeks to control their lives, make decisions and implement them.

Students with middle level of life-purpose orientations experience dissatisfaction with their lives in the present; they live for the day or yesterday, have weakly defined life purpose, do not eager to plan and control their lives.

### Self-assessment of volitional and personal aspects of the students' individual

To study the self-assessment, volitional aspects of the individual, and extraversion/intraversion, we used the method of "Personal differential". The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Students' life-purpose orientation levels

Scales of Personal differential method	Levels, %		
	High	Middle	Low
Rate	8	64	28
Strength	32	68	-
Activity	4	40	56

Results of the study indicate that the majority of students experiences a critical attitude to themselves, and is not always able to keep the traditional line of behavior. Focus on inner world, calm emotional reactions prevail among the students. No students with neurotic problems have been revealed.

### The level of the students' subjective control

With the help of the "Level of subjective control" method we determined the level of the student's subjective control over a variety of situations, the degree of person's responsibility for his/her actions and life. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Students' subjective control levels

Scales of Subjective control level method	Levels, %	
	High	Low
General internality	70	30
Internality in achievements	66	34
Internality in family relations	56	44
Internality in terms of health and diseases	48	52

Only 30% of test subjects do not see the connection between their actions and significant events, which they consider as the result of chance or action of others; they attribute their successes, achievements and joy to external circumstances such as good luck, good fortune, or assistance of other people. 52% of test subjects make no efforts to preserve their health, hoping for professional medical care.

***Studying the use of humor by students***

The methods of Situational Humor Response Questionnaire and coping humor scale revealed that 56% of test subjects use humor with pleasure in different situations, considering it an effective tool to maintain interpersonal relationships, relieve tension in stressful situations.

**Relationship between the use of humor and indicators of students' "Self-concept"**

The significant indicators are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. The significant indicators of humor and Self-concept relationship

Self-concept indicators	r	Level of reliability
Life orientations (interest, emotional richness)	0.684	p=0.01
Locus of control - life controllability	0.435	p=0.001
Self-assessment	0.669	p=0.01
Volition	0.576	p=0.01
Extraversion	0.768	p=0.01
Subjective control	0.885	p=0.001

Correlation analysis suggests that the CHS and SHRQ methods ( $r=0.694$ ,  $p=0.01$ ) are aimed at the study of one and the same construct, namely humor.

**Discussion and conclusion**

Most of sampled students have an internal level of control over the significant events in their lives. The test subjects suggest that most of the events in their lives was the result of their own actions, and that they can control them and, therefore, take responsibility for their lives in general. Subjective control over emotionally positive events in the lives prevails among the students.

More than half of the respondents are optimistic students who use humor with pleasure in different situations, considering it an effective tool to maintain interpersonal relationships, relieve tension in stressful situations. These data are consistent with the results of the study (Artemyeva, 2013).

The study has established interdependence of life orientations of students and frequency of use of humor in everyday life and in stressful situations. Students able to understand humor and use it in their lives are characterized by the presence of the goals in the future; they find the process of their lives interesting, emotionally rich and full of meaning; give meaning, orientation and time perspective to their lives. They have a sufficient freedom of choice, purposefulness of their actions.

We revealed close relationship between all the parameters of the Personal differential method and humor. The optimistic students have adequate self-esteem, accept themselves as a person, prone to accept themselves as a carrier of positive, socially desirable characteristics, and have a high level of self-control. The results of this study are consistent with the statements by Martin (2003, 2009, 2010) that the students actively using humor are characterized by the prevailing externality.

We established the relationship between the use of humor and the level of the student's subjective control over a variety of situations, the degree of person's responsibility for his/her actions and life. Our study has found that the test subjects actively using the potential of humor have a high level of subjective control over important life events. These findings are consistent with the studies by N. Kuiper and R. Martin, who found that people with higher level of optimism

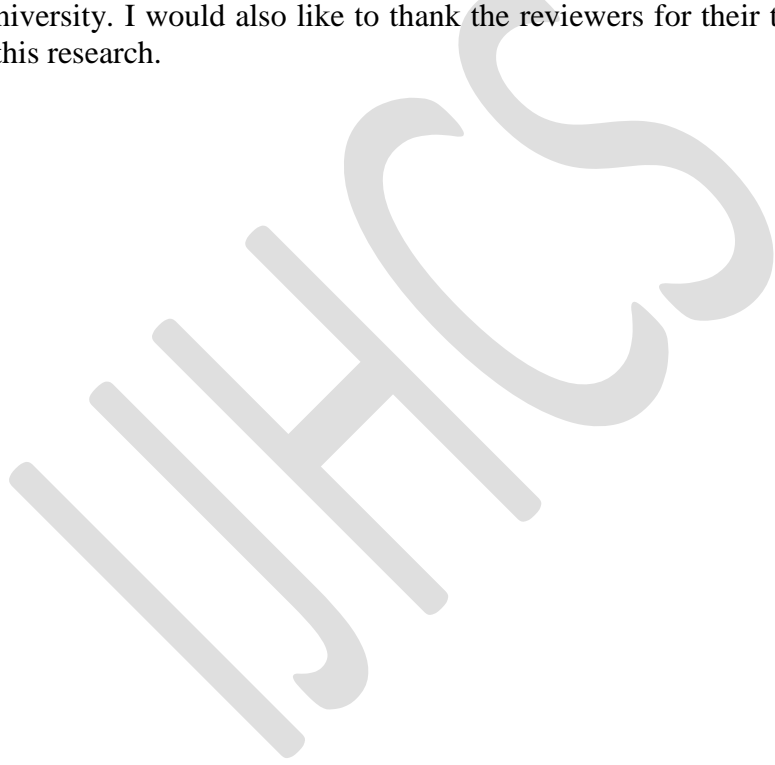
tend to be more positive, harmonious, stable and realistic Self-concept (Martin, 2003; Akhmetzyanova, 2015, Ivanova, 2002).

Thus, the conducted study suggests that the use of humor is largely determined by life orientation, self-esteem of students. Students, who actively use humor as a defense mechanism in coping with stress and are able to create humorous products by themselves, have adequate self-esteem, accept themselves as a person, prone to accept themselves as a carrier of positive, socially desirable characteristics, and have a high level of self-control.

The prospects for study of the problems are related to the conduct of empirical research on the role of age and gender, occupational and status characteristics, moral and value systems in the manifestations of optimism.

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