Original Papers

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Humor From The Perspective Of Positive Psychology. Implications For Research On Development In Adulthood

The purpose of the article is the presentation of the ways that humor was understood within the current of positive psychology; the state and advances of research on the significance of this property in achieving and safeguarding a "good life" as well as the legitimacy and possibility of applying the theoretical and research approach devised by the mentioned orientation approaches to issues connected with humor to the field of developmental psychology during the life course. A conceptualisation of humor was presented as a character strength comprising the virtue of transcendence in the approach of Peterson and Seligman, a composite of wisdom in the concept of Webster and of a thinking style, experiencing and action in the theory of Martin. A review of research was then undertaken: humor as a virtue imbuing property; humor correlates understood from the perspective of positive psychology; manifestations of its regulative role and individual differences in humor as a resource contributing to individual growth. In the closing paragraphs a suggestion was formulated regarding humor research as a resource that supports positive development, namely, the fulfilment of developmental tasks, overcoming developmental crises and coping with problems connected with ageing.

Keywords: humor, humor styles, positive psychology, virtues, character strengths, wisdom, life course development

Introduction

With the set goal of identifying the premises of a "good life," positive psychology focused the attention of theorists and researchers on the so far neglected aspects of human functioning. These aspects include, among others, permanent, personal dispositions supporting the subjective well-being, responsible for coping with life tasks and challenges and promoting individual achievements. The "strong sides" of human nature that are worth developing include, among others, a sense of personal effectiveness or control, hope and humor (Trzebińska, 2008). The latter during the last decade has been intensively explored from the perspectives of three approaches present in positive psychology: virtues/strengths of character of Peterson and Seligman (2004), wisdom of Webster (2003, 2007, 2010), and humor styles of Martin and colleagues (2003).

Humor in concepts from the positive psychology current

In line with the fundamental premise of Peterson and Seligman (2004), a person possesses six, contributing to collecting favourable experiences, virtues - wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence. They are composed of a group of traits, referred to as character strengths that are divided into cognitive, emotional, volitional, interpersonal and transcendental (cf. Peterson & Park, 2007). Character strengths constitute the basic, positive psychical properties serving the achievement of virtues. Both the former and the latter are perceived as the internal determinants of a full, supplying satisfaction, life (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; cf. also Beermann & Ruch, 2009a,b).

The most ordered and exhaustive classification of character strengths and virtues - the *CSV* - was proposed by Peterson & Seligman (2004). The basic criteria, which once fulfilled, enabled the given virtue to be included in the *CSV*, encompassed, among others: ubiquity, including cultural universality; interindividual diversity, which is

accompanied by a relative inner constancy; moral value "in its own right"; plasticity in way of being manifest; and being cultivated by social institutions with the aid of several practices or rituals (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; cf. also Carbelo-Baquero & Jáuregui, 2006; Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Peterson & Park, 2007). The above conditions are fulfilled by humor, which is acknowledged in the systematisation of Peterson and Seligman (2004; cf. also Carbelo-Baquero & Jáuregui, 2006; Gulla & Tucholska, 2007) as one of the twenty-four character strengths and one of six comprising the transcendence virtue. The Authors of the concept (2004, p. 530) perceive the positive function of humor in "making the human condition more bearable by drawing attention to contradictions contained therein, by sustaining good cheer in the face of despair, by building social bonds, and by lubricating social interactions." Under the concept of humor they understand (cf. also Gulla & Tucholska, 2007; Peterson & Park, 2007): liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people, joking around, as well as seeing the light side of adversity[1]. The Authors of the *CSV* (op. cit.) consider, therefore, those aspects of a sense of humor as favourable that sustain positive emotions of the subject and their environment, although they were well aware of the existence of both the strictly speaking negative manifestations of humor (e.g., sarcasm, ridicule, humiliation), as well as its bordering forms (e.g. parody).[2]

Another conceptualisation of humor from the perspective of positive psychology was suggested by Webster (2003, 2007, 2010; Taylor, Bates & Webster, 2011; cf. also Beermann & Ruch, 2009a; Steuden, 2011). This Author approaches humor as one of the five key components of wisdom. The latter was defined by Webster (2007, p. 164; cf. also Webster, 2010, p. 71) on the operational level as: "Wisdom is the competence in, intention to, and application of, critical life experiences to facilitate the optimal development of self and others." According to the mentioned Author its competence aspect is reflected in the ability to make decisions, choices, solving problems, intentional - in the tendency to prudently set goals for own activity, and the applicational – in consequent implementation of planned actions in life. Wisdom, thus understood, would be a multidimensional construct that includes five basic, mutually dependent elements. Each of them would be a prerequisite, but insufficient in its own right, for the characterised phenomenon to function (Webster,

2003, 2007; cf. also Taylor et al., 2011). Webster (op. cit.) identified the following components of wisdom (op. cit.): 1/ experience – sufficiently rich and diverse, acquired in the context of interpersonal relations amidst the struggles connected with the critical events of life and making difficult choices, often constituting moral challenges; 2/ emotional control – encompassing: the ability to identify emotions, including differentiating between their subtle nuances, accepting the full repertoire of emotions, implementing them depending on the circumstances (emotional tuning) and using them in a constructive and creative manner; 3/ reminiscence and reflectivity – reference to previously acquired experiences, an evaluating reflection of one's own past and present life, serving to maintain a sense of identity, a deeper understanding of oneself, effective problem solving and adaptive coping with them (thanks to the acquisition of perspective, among others); 4/ openness to new experiences – ideas, information, values, viewpoints, approaches to problem solving, increasing the chances of overcoming obstacles, readiness to try out novelties, appreciating diverse, often controversial perspectives, tolerating differences; 5/ humor – noticing the absurdities of life; appreciating and using its manifestations as a mature coping strategy with problems; the ability and willingness to improve the well-being of other people with it.

According to Webster (op. cit) not all the humor types contribute to perfecting wisdom. Those that do not contribute to it include, for instance, sarcasm, teasing, biting and spiteful humor. Wisdom is developed on the other hand by perceiving and understanding irony, reduction of both personal and other people's stress with the aid of humor, establishment and development of close relations with its aid. Another aspect of humor significant in shaping wisdom is, according to Webster (2007, 2010), approaching oneself with forgiving distance. Pietrasiński (2001, 2008), also includes readiness to subject oneself to an independent, critical reflection to the subjective, personality determinants of wisdom. According to this Author (2008), self-distance enables the raising of the so-called self-creation competence – the ability to build one's own biography, wisely directing one's life and personal development enabling the utilisation of the potential held. A significant manifestation of distance to the "self" is, according to Pietrasiński (2001, 2008), the ability to be ironic towards oneself – perceiving and commenting one's own limitations – weaknesses, mistakes, failures "with a pinch of salt" and allowing the surroundings to laugh at them.

It was also pointed out by Martin (2003, 2007; Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray & Weir, 2003) that humor styles are a significant aspect thereof in the perspective of positive psychology. This Author (op. cit.) defined them as individually diverse, serving interpersonal and/or intrapsychical goals, ways of using humor and created his own model of them. What is significant is that both adaptive

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[1] Peterson and Seligman (2004) include humor in interpersonal strengths, however - also referred to as a sense of humor or playfulness - it is sometimes included in emotional strengths (Peterson & Park, 2007; Trzebińska, 2008).

[2] Their way of approaching the "adaptive" nature of humor seems to be close to the theses of Vaillant (2005, 2007; cf. also Ruch, Proyer & Weber, 2010a; Webster, 2003, 2007). He included humor – alongside altruism, sublimation and suppression (stoicism) – in mature defence mechanisms but attributed salutogenic properties only to those of its forms that do not give rise to discomfort in the subject, do not give rise to negative feelings and are not connected with the exclusion of others.

and nonadaptive humor styles are included therein, because Martin (2003, 2007) considers the low intensity of the latter to also significantly contribute to a "good life." Among the positive styles, the Author (2003, 2007; Martin et al., 2003; cf. also McGhee, 2010), includes affiliative and self-enhancing styles, while the disadvantageous include aggressive and self-defeating styles. The affiliative humor style is constructive in nature and concentrated on the social environment. It is characterised by a lack of hostility and a generally friendly approach to oneself and to other people. It serves, among others, to sustain the well-being of the surroundings as well as a friendly casual atmosphere within a group, preventing conflicts between its members, relieving tension in relations, reducing the distance (inducing, facilitating, up-keeping contacts), strengthening human relations, streamlining communication, increasing group cohesion and building identity, as well as strengthening the standards that are accepted by the majority. It is manifest in making people laugh, telling them jokes and funny stories, etc. The self-enhancing humor style as well as the adaptive style are fundamentally concentrated around supporting own resources and coping strategies. It raises self-confidence and faith in one's own possibilities. It serves, among others to protect against stress, relieve negative emotions and promote positive ones, including a sense of authorship, influence and controlling the situation. It is manifest in reducing tension by maintaining a distanced, realistic, slightly comical way of perceiving both life's "ups" and "downs," playing down and re-evaluating problems, etc. An aggressive humor style is destructive in nature and concentrates on the fulfilment of personal, antisocial goals. It is characterised by hostility and sarcasm towards others and lack of respect for the milieu. It serves, among others, to maintain control and manipulate the environment, building assertiveness and strengthening independence but in a socially unacceptable way. It is displayed, among others, in deriving pleasure from jokingly degrading others, laughing at them, using potentially offensive sexist and/or racist humor, being inconsiderate of the feelings of the recipients of the jokes as well as a compulsive, devoid of tact and not suited to the place or circumstances of humor expression. The self-defeating humor style is harmful because it is overly concentrated on social relations in a disadvantageous way for the self. It is a manifestation of emotional dependence from the milieu and a lack of self-acceptance. It serves, e.g., strengthening relations with others, obtaining their friendship and approval and trying to please them at the expense of one's self. This manifests itself by exaggeratingly making oneself the laughing stock, exaggerated self-irony, allowing oneself to be the "scapegoat" (also passively) of degrading jokes, joining in when being laughed at, discrediting one's own competences, getting involved in behaviour that make other people laugh in order to conceal true negative feelings, denying one's

own emotional needs, etc. (Martin, 2003, 2007; Martin et al., 2003; cf. also Ruch, 2008). According to Erickson and Feldstein (2007), both constructive humor styles – the affiliative and self-enhancing, can be treated as positive properties of an individual that are identical to character and/or virtue strengths.

Humor as a character strength, a composite of wisdom and adaptive style of functioning - a review of research results

One of the challenges that humor researchers face in the context of positive psychology is establishing which aspects of it are responsible for the high, in the subjective sense, quality of life. Identification of the forms of humor that support well-being would enable the degree to which they imbue each of the six virtues, to be identified. The first of the research currents mentioned below is dedicated to the investigation of this very aspect. The second of them concerns significant humor correlates approached from the perspective of positive psychology, and the third – the empirically proven signs of its regulative role, while the fourth is dedicated to individual differences in humor as a resource contributing to individual growth.

Humor as a property imbuing virtues

The significance of humor for perfecting given virtues was analysed by Beermann and Ruch (2009b; cf. also Beermann, 2010). Respondents – adults that are not experts in the object of the research estimated the degree of their subjective importance and the frequency of achieving given virtues with the aid of humor. Furthermore, they also described in which ordinary situations they use humor to "practice" wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence, and also declared how often they use friendly and/or hostile humor styles in achieving this goal[3]. Although the most important traits were justice and humanity, humor most often supported the fulfilment of humanity (e.g. comforting others by making funny remarks) and wisdom (giving advice in a humorous way). The latter was developed in a humorous way significantly more often than the virtue of temperance and transcendence. Humor was significantly less frequently connected with situations involving justice and transcendence than in the utilisation of the remaining virtues. These results show that the perspective of a lay person is convergent only with the opinions of only some theorists and researchers from the positive psychology current – the one that associates humor with wisdom. In popular thinking, it is less frequently associated with spirituality, transgressing boundaries, or

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3   Friendly humor styles include: humor, fun and nonsense; wit obtained a neutral humor style, while aggressive humor styles include: irony, satire, sarcasm and cynicism (Schmidt-Hidding, 1963; quoted after: Beermann & Ruch, 2009b; cf. also Ruch, 2004).

forces relating to a supreme reality. Beermann and Ruch (op.cit.) also revealed that friendly humor styles (with the exception of nonsense) are used more often in the "application" of virtues than hostile humor styles (with the exception of irony). Only justice was achieved more often with the aid of sarcasm and/or cynicism. This result, however, suggests also that the so-called non-constructive humor styles (e.g. aggression) to a certain extent and in specific situations may contribute to the perfecting of virtues. It is worth, therefore, taking them into account in further studies.

In continuing research on anchoring humor in given virtues, Beermann and Ruch (2009a; cf. also Beermann, 2010) left aside ordinary experiences described by lay people and concentrated on analyses undertaken by experts. In doing this, the Authors (op. cit.) referred to the previously constructed and universally used twelve questionnaires measuring various aspects of a sense of humor, amongst these to two that approach them in the categories of character strengths and the wisdom component. In making a synthesis of the items comprising them, they created the so-called *Humor Rating List* (*HRL*). It enabled identification of the components of humor in which given virtues are located as well as comparison of the degree to which each of them was imbued with a given aspect of a sense of humor. It was found (op. cit.) that respondents considered as highly virtuous the following humorous behaviour and attitudes: 1/ serving arousing and/or enhancing other people's positive feelings; 2/ favourable to more effective coping with stress and maintaining subjective well-being; 3/ were connected with a greater sensitivity to funny events and their greater appreciation also with the aid of warm, friendly laughter[4]. Moreover, it was shown that each of the six cardinal virtues is found, to a smaller or greater degree, in the humor components co-creating *HRL*, wherein wisdom, humanity and transcendence were most frequently connected thereto. Recapitulating, the evaluations of the lay people carried out in the previous and present study have been shown to be significantly convergent with the expectations of experts, which enables the unequivocal conclusion to be drawn regarding the "virtuousness" of humor. Its essence seems to be humanity (improving other peoples' mood, taking care of their psychic comfort), transcendence (hope and optimism filled view of life, including the crises that are an inherent part of life), as well as wisdom (combining the contradictions entailed in everyday events, and experiencing amusement as a result of intellectual reception of a play on words). These results are hardly surprising seeing that the very creators of the *CSV* saw in humor also elements of the virtue of humanity (establishment of social bonds) and wisdom (assistance in

acquiring, perfecting and using knowledge; cf. Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

The relationship of humor, understood as a character strength that co-creates the virtue of transcendence, with the dimensions of humorous behaviour identified in the model of Craik, Lampert and Nelson and aspects of a sense of humor considered in the conceptualisation of McGhee was researched by Müller and Ruch (2011). They also analysed the relationships between three of the mentioned models of humor and the remaining virtues and character strengths from the list of Peterson & Seligman (2004). Humor, diagnosed with the aid of *VIA-IS*[5], turned out to positively correlate with the socially warm and competent style of humorous behaviour, as well as with a sense of humor which included: enjoyment of humor, verbal humor, ease of perceiving and appreciating humor in everyday life, laughing at oneself and humor under stress. Furthermore, humor as a character strength to a smaller or greater extent was imbued by the remaining strengths with the exception of open-mindedness, persistence, modesty, prudence, self-regulation and religiousness; cf. also Brdar & Kashdan, 2010). This last result suggests involving humor in using many character strengths serving to fulfil qualitatively different virtues.

Concluding, the abovementioned results of three studies confirm that humor approached as a character strength seems to imbue not only the virtue of transcendence but also that of humanity and wisdom. Thus, diagnosed with the aid of the *VIA-IS* it does not include all the manifestations compatible with virtues. Hence the need for new studies that would be more adequate[6] and include more complex questionnaire instruments to measure humor as a virtue (cf. also Ruch, 2008).

A separate problem undertaken in the research was the constancy of the factor structure of character strengths and virtues as well as the place of humor in different solutions other than those propounded by Peterson and Seligman (2004). And so, Brdar and Kashdan (2010), verifying the *CSV* on the Croatian ground obtained four variables corresponding to virtues called: interpersonal strengths, fortitude, vitality and cautiousness. Humor was included in vitality, although it also strongly imbued interpersonal strengths. The virtue of vitality which also included: zest, hope, curiosity and perseverance, revealed a positive and moderately strong correlation with satisfaction coming from satisfying the need for autonomy, belonging and personal competence. A four-factor solution, similar to the one presented above, was also prepared in Australia by MacDonald, Bore and Munro (2008). The factors obtained by the Authors were named: niceness, intellect,

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4   The identification of humor aspects representing virtues was performed by students, whereas identification of the most compatible virtues with humor was carried out by philosophers, theologians and religious studies experts.

5   *VIA-IS – The Values In Action Inventory of Strengths* (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) measures the intensity of given character strengths and virtues.

6   Encompassing the entire spectrum of the "virtuosness" of humor.

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positivity and conscientiousness. Humor imbued the virtue of positivity. Five factors were obtained from analyses conducted in India (Singh & Choubisa, 2010). The virtues identified were called strengths: civic strengths, self-assurance strengths, interpersonal strengths, intellectual strengths and theological strengths. Humor was included in interpersonal strengths. The presented results reveal that the *CSV* suggested as being universal does not fully enable reconstruction in other cultural contexts other than the original. Nevertheless, regardless of the result obtained, humor is classified either in character strengths that are beneficial for interpersonal relations (interpersonal strengths), or motivating to action with the use of positive emotions accompanying it (vitality and/or positivity).

Humor correlates as a positive disposition

In searching for the correlates of humor as a positive property, Peterson, Ruch, Beermann, Park and Seligman (2007; cf. also Brdar & Kashdan, 2010; Lounsbury, Fisher, Levy & Welsh, 2009; Ruch, Proyer & Weber, 2010a,b) revealed that among adults this resource, understood as a character strength, moderately strongly related to satisfaction with life[7] and somewhat more weakly with the three, qualitatively different ways of achieving happiness – orientation to: pleasure (hedonistic), involvement (experience of flow) and significance/sense (eudaimonic). This result confirms the conviction that not only positive affect and amusement that constitute a part of experiencing humor contribute to subjective well-being. Humor can maintain it also thanks to a positive influence on other people that propagates a distanced and "healthy" philosophy of life.

A positive correlation of wisdom (one of the elements of which constitutes humor) with generativity and ego integrity in the approach of Erikson was reported by Webster (2003, 2007, 2010; cf. also Taylor et al., 2011). Wise individuals are therefore characterised by sharing their experiences with others, and passing them on to the next generations in the form of, for instance, support and given advice. They also accept an independently chosen path in life, own choices and decisions. Perhaps satisfaction from the achievements to date enables wisdom to be accompanied by a high level of adaptive leadership styles (Kristinsson, 2005; quoted after: Webster, 2010), forgiveness and psychological well-being in the approach of Ryff, which is comprised of, e.g. positive relations with others and a environmental mastery (Taylor et al., 2011; cf. also Webster, 2010). What is interesting, wisdom in the conceptualisation of Webster (2003, 2007; cf. also Taylor et al., 2011) did not reveal a significant relationship neither with age nor with the level

of education, which proves that a simple cumulation of experiences, regardless of the circumstances in which they were acquired as well as their quality, is insufficient for this resource to be developed.

In other studies of the same Author (Webster, 2010), wisdom (which co-creates humor, among others) also corresponded with the orientation towards self-enhancing values (e.g., insight and personal growth) and others (e.g., the well-being of friends, social involvement, environmental protection), possessing clearly defined goals, a sense of personal cohesion and agency, the need to collect continually new experiences and take on inspiring challenges. In the mentioned study (Webster, 2010), wisdom turned out to be accompanied by a greater attributional complexity – the degree to which an individual identifies and integrates numerous possible causes of given social behaviours (both past and present factors that are both dispositional and situational). This last result confirms that a wise person formulates the explanations of the actions of other people based on a greater number of their qualitatively diverse potential determinants. Webster (2007, 2010) finally obtained a negative correlation between wisdom and avoiding closeness in relations as well as with fear experienced in a relationship. This result suggests that wisdom is accompanied by the awareness of importance and the inclination to maintain intimate social contacts, satisfying significant emotional needs.

The affiliative and self-enhancing humor style turned out to be positively, and the self-defeating negatively, related to psychological well-being in the approach of Ryff, which is comprised of self-acceptance, the pursuit of meaningful goals and a sense of purpose in life, continued growth and development as a person, a sense of autonomy, and as mentioned earlier, the establishment of quality ties with other people and the ability to manage complex environments (Martin et al., 2003; cf. also Martin, 2007). Both constructive humor styles significantly positively correlated with well-being not only in the population of Canadians, but also Iranians, Libyans and Armenians (Kaoru-ei, Doost, De Shiri & Heidari, 2009; Kazarian & Martin, 2004, 2006). Among Turkish students, the intensity of the affiliative, self-enhancing and aggressive humor style significantly differentiated the level of subjective well-being – persons declaring using both constructive styles more often in comparison to their peers who used them less frequently, were characterised by a greater subjective well-being, similarly to those individuals that used the aggressive humor style less frequently (Bilge & Saltuk, 2007). In the mentioned population as many as 49% of the variability of the subjective well-being was explained by two humor styles – the self-enhancing (35% of the variability) and aggressive (14% variability; Tümkaya, 2011). Also, studies involving adolescents aged 12-15 years have shown that constructive humor styles are accompanied by

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7   It explains approximately 10% of the variance of this variable obtaining a high - 7/8 position (out of 24) on the list of strongest predictors of life satisfaction (Park et al., 2004; Peterson et al., 2007; Ruch et al., 2010a,b). Life satisfaction in all the conducted studies was defined as a general, cognitive evaluation thereof.

better adaptation understood as satisfactory interpersonal relations (with peers and parents), a high self-esteem and self-reliance (Erickson & Feldstein, 2007). The aggressive and self-defeating humor styles went hand in hand with a worse adaptation revealing the level of well-being.

The abovementioned results of Martin and colleagues (2003) encouraged Duma (2009) to undertake further and more insightful analysis thereof. The Author adopted as his theoretical base the three-dimensional concept of well-being of Keyes and Waterman (2003; quoted after: Wojciechowska, 2008), which identifies three of its aspects: psychological, emotional and social. Duma (op. cit.) found positive correlations (ranging from a weak to moderate strength) between constructive humor styles (affiliative and self-enhancing) and all three dimensions of well-being – psychological, social and emotional[8] and their components[9]. Moreover, the self-enhancing humor style turned out to be a significant predictor of all three categories of well-being. Non-constructive humor styles, on the other hand, revealed a significant and weak relation with a small number of dimensions of well-being and their components. The aggressive humor style turned out to have a positive correlation only with autonomy, and negatively only with establishment of quality ties with others and the acceptance of society, whereas the self-defeating humor style was negatively connected with psychological well-being and two of its components – the ability to manage complex environments and the establishment of quality ties with others. Finally, the intensity of the self-defeating humor style turned out to be significant in foreseeing the level of all three dimensions of well-being (negative relationship).

Manifestations of the regulative role of humor as a positive resource

The significant, eliminating the effects of health problems, role of humor have been shown by the studies conducted by Peterson, Park and Seligman (2006). They obtained a greater intensity of the mentioned property understood as a character strength in persons that fully recovered from a serious illness in comparison to individuals that have never experienced this type of problem. Humor, courage and kindness turned out to be independent

predictors of life satisfaction and variables mediating between the "history" of a serious illness (deficit, being sustained, overcoming it) and that satisfaction. According to the Authors (op. cit.) enhancing the mentioned strengths may contribute to the recovery of well-being after going through serious health crises.

The object of interest of Cann and Etzel (2008; cf. also Cann, Stiwell & Taku, 2010) was the analysis of the function directed towards "self" humor styles as a coping strategy. They showed that more frequent use of the self-defeating humor style goes hand in hand with a lower level of happiness, dispositional optimism and hope. The effective use of humor to support the "self," on the other hand, enhances the mentioned positive properties through which, as a secondary effect, the intensity of the perceived stress is reduced – both that, which is experienced retrospectively as well as anticipated. Emotional positivity is therefore beneficial to perceiving problems as being less threatening, making it easier to cope with them.

Empirical verification of the model, suggesting that relationships exist between the directed towards the "self" humor styles and the perception of stress and health, was performed by Cann and colleagues (2010). In accordance therewith, the stronger tendency to use self-enhancing humor styles and weaker susceptibility to use the self-defeating humor style contribute to greater positivity and intensity of the psychological attributes of happiness, dispositional optimism and hope. These properties are mediators of the relationship between the mentioned humor styles and the intensity of the stress perceived as well as subjectively evaluated physical and psychological health (negative relationship).

The significance of the selected humor styles as mediators between the self-evaluative standards and psychological well-being was studied by Kuiper and McHale (2009). They found that positive standards of self-evaluation are accompanied by an affiliative humor style, and secondarily - as a result of raising social self-evaluation and lowering the level of depression - increasing well-being. The negative standards of self-evaluation, on the other hand, turned out to lead to a less frequent use of the affiliative humor style and a lower social self-evaluation, as well as to more frequent use of the self-defeating humor style and – due to the social rejection – to a reduced well-being.

The role of emotional experiences in relationships with parents that are favourable for personal growth as well as harmful humor styles were studied by Kazarian, Moghnie and Martin (2010). They analysed the relations existing between parental acceptance and rejection in the retrospect of adults and the intensity of their humor styles as well as their subjective happiness. They showed that the warmth showed by mothers and fathers had a positive correlation with the use of both constructive humor styles and negatively with the use of disadaptive styles, whereas a

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[8] Psychological well-being is defined by Wojciechowska (2008, p. 11) as a "multidimensional and integrated condition of an individual which is composed of its experiences related to the actualisation of one's own potential and living in agreement with one's self." Social well-being is termed by the said Author as "a sense of well-being resulting from belonging to a given society or community," whereas emotional well-being as "experiencing positive feelings, happiness and welfare."

[9] Psychological well-being in the approach of Wojciechowska (2008) is comprised of self-acceptance, purpose in life, personal development, managing the environment, autonomy and establishment of quality ties with other people. The components of social well-being include acceptance of society, self-fulfilment in society; and social: input, coherence and integration. Emotional well-being is jointly created by: positive and negative feelings, satisfaction and general satisfaction with life as well as happiness.

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lack of love and care from the side of parents was positively connected with the frequency of using non-constructive humor styles and negatively with the use of adaptive styles. Only the self-enhancing humor style mediated the relation between the acceptance and rejection by the mother and father separately, remembered from the period when they were 7-12 years old, and subjective happiness in adulthood. The individuals that evaluated their parent's involvement in relationships higher manifest the mentioned humor style more frequently which, in turn, enabled them to experience greater happiness. Both active (hostility and aggression), and passive (indifference and neglect) forms of rejection reduced the tendency to use the self-enhancing humor style, the effect of which was the reduction of the well-being experienced in later life. Therefore, it seems that the emotional bond of the parents with their child determines the shaping of given humor styles in them, which, in effect, can determine the level of happiness and well-being in later life.

Individual differences in humor as a positive property

The differences connected with sex in humor intensity understood as strength of character was shown by Ruch and colleagues (2010b) - adult men obtained higher results than women of a similar age. Moreover, humor only in men turned out to be one of the five highest evaluated character strengths and only in the male group was one of the four significant predictors of the intensity of satisfaction with life (Brdar, Anić & Rijavec, 2011). Linley and colleagues (2007) also obtained intersexual differences in subjective importance of humor as a character strength – in men it came in 8th position, whereas in women it came in 12th position. These results remain in agreement with the results obtained by Martina and colleagues (2003; cf. also Martin, 2007) and in several other studies (e.g., Chen & Martin, 2007; Kaoru-ei et al., 2009; Kazarian & Martin, 2004, 2006; Kazarian et al., 2010; Tümkaya, 2011). All the mentioned Authors revealed sex-related differences in the level of non-constructive humor styles (aggressive and self-defeating) – a significantly higher intensity thereof was found in men when compared to women. The differences found are explained by the male tendency, which is conditioned by social expectations, to dominate – striving to achieve a desired status, obtaining and defending a high position. The manifestation of humor serving the fulfilment of the above goals is part of the stereotype of the male sex role. Similar expectations are not held towards women, who foster harmony and closeness, hence, humor is generated less frequently by them and is considered a less important personal competence to obtain approval and is used in forms that do not hurt others.

Analysis of the differences in humor intensity**,** understood as a character strength, connected with marital status revealed that in the group of adolescents (aged below

20) and 20-30-year-olds, persons that were single obtained higher results than married persons. This result is not surprising seeing that humor, which increases interpersonal attractiveness, can serve as an effective strategy to attract a sexual partner. It is used more often in the 41-50- and 51-60-year-old age group by those that live in separation or are divorced in comparison to singles and individuals remaining in marital relations (Ruch et al., 2010b). Perhaps persons without a "partner" after becoming 40 years old already accept this lack and no longer make attempts to acquire one, while individuals that once again become single again try, with the use of humor, to attract the attention of the opposite sex.

Summing up, the humor that seems to have an adaptive impact is that, which is divest of hostility – friendly, integrating and allowing distance to be maintained (Carbelo-Baquero & Jáuregui, 2006; Martin, 2003, 2007; Trzebińska, 2008). This thesis is also confirmed by the results of research conducted by Kuiper, Grimshaw, Leite and Kirsh (2004; cf. also Kuiper & Nicholl, 2004), who found that better psychological health, thus, a lower intensity of depressiveness, anxiety and negative affect, a higher self-esteem and greater intensity of positive emotions, is accompanied by use of humor adapted to the circumstances in order to overcome adversities, laughing at the absurdities of life or making others laugh. Over sensitivity - an exaggerated and negative reaction to funny remarks of the milieu and use of an overly critical and "masochistic" form of humor, however, gives opposite results.

Implications for research on positive development in adulthood

The importance of research on humor as a character strength in the context of the human life course is highlighted by Ruch and colleagues (2010a,b). They suggest comparative analyses to be carried out on the input of the identified aspects of humor[10] in subjective well-being and/or life satisfaction as well as on the relations between these humor components with the three earlier mentioned orientations for achieving happiness in early, middle and late adulthood[11]. However, the mentioned Authors narrow

10   Based on the concepts presented earlier and the results of empirical studies they can be divided into animating – connected with experiencing a joyful and action motivating excitation (as a vital strength); relational - manifested in contacts with others (as an interpersonal strength), affective – as a coping competence (as an emotional strength equal to positivity), philosophical – enabling a healthy distance to be maintained, a forgiving attitude towards the world and towards oneself (as a sense-giving strength) (Author's own proposal).

11   Humor as a vital strength should be connected more often with a hedonistic orientation towards experiencing happiness, approached as an emotional strength and/or sense-giving with an orientation towards meaning (eudaimonic), and described as an interpersonal strength – with orientation towards involvement. However, there is a lack of grounds to

their reflections down to searching for changes in the meaning of the considered dimensions of humor connected with the chronological age *per se*. In the meantime, as accentuated by Trempała (2011, p. 47; cf. also Trempała, 2000), "the age of life [in its own right – Author's note] is an empty category, without content, that does not explain anything." Furthermore, in favour of chronological age as an ambiguous concept are the "hidden" variables - the effects of the action of both biological factors (e.g., maturing), as well as environmental factors and their mutual interactions. In the context of the above, it therefore seems worthwhile and, moreover, necessary to penetrate further into the reasons for the registered changes, namely the developmental normatives and mechanisms.

A prerequisite of achieving a sense of fulfilment in given sub-stages of adulthood seems to be the fulfilment of the attributed developmental tasks that is crowned with success. Assuming that humor will also be subordinated thereto, it can be expected that there will be differences in the importance or rank of its given aspects, which are connected with the specificity of the mentioned tasks. And so, for instance, the most important developmental task in early adulthood is establishing and maintaining deep and permanent relationships with others - the choice of partner, learning to co-exist with them, starting a family and bringing up children, finding one's own social group, as well as fostering friendship (Havighurst, 1981; quoted after: Brzezińska, 2000; Ziółkowska, 2005). Empirical confirmation of this fact is supplied, for instance, by the studies of Brzezińska, Stolarska and Zielińska (2002). They have shown that the quality of life of young adults, contrary to persons above 40 years of age, depend - to the greatest extent - on satisfactory relations with others. Humor, perceived as an interpersonal strength or affiliative style of functioning, can certainly be of help in building and fostering them. Whereas the key, developmental tasks and events in old age are considered to be accepting the unavoidable loss of health, physical fitness and cognitive function, loved one's (death of peers, siblings, etc.), social status and making a positive balance of life (Brzezińska, 2000; Brzezińska & Hejmanowski, 2005; Janiszewska-Rain, 2005). It seems that their fulfilment should facilitate the use of humor as an affective and sense giving strength, enabling a dialectic approach to reality and a forgiving (self)irony, therefore also the use of the self-enhancing style. In other words, differences in the extent to which humor will imbue given traits can be expected to be related to the developmental period (and more precisely - with the nature of the developmental tasks and crises that are an intrinsic part of it – more reference thereto below). Young adults should reveal a stronger tendency to associate humor with the virtue of humanity, while senior citizens – with

the virtues of transcendence and/or wisdom. The above, requiring empirical verification, hypothesis is supported by the results obtained by Martin and colleagues (2003; cf. also Martin, 2007), showing an increasing with age drop in the frequency of using humor styles that are manifest in relations with others (affiliative and aggressive; also Chen & Martin, 2007; Romero, Alsua, Hinrichs & Pearson, 2007) and the simultaneous increase in intensity of the self-enhancing humor style (in women). What is more, Kazarian and Martin (2006) revealed that older respondents[12] are less susceptible than younger ones to use non-constructive humor styles – aggressive and self-defeating, while maintaining a comparable with the younger group tendency to use humor in order to cope with stress. Analogous results in the Polish sample were obtained by Charytonik (2009) when comparing the stages of early and middle adulthood. The above results, in order to confirm their universality, require replication in subsequent studies, including those conducted in other cultural regions[13]. The observed tendencies can be explained by other developmental regularities – the process of the interiorisation of the personality that becomes more marked with age, namely concentrating more attention to one's own inner experiences than to phenomena taking place in the social environment (Straś-Romanowska, 2002). This would give rise to a greater distance to "self", independence of judgements and healthy self-criticism, which would, in effect, promote the use of the self-enhancing humor style.

Moreover, it would also be worth verifying whether and what aspects of humor[14] and to what extent help overcome developmental crises proper to given sub-stages of adulthood. For instance, it seems that a positive solution to the Eriksonian crisis of intimacy *versus* isolation that is inherent to early adulthood should be facilitated by use of a socially warm, benign and competent, adapted to the circumstances, humorous style of behaviour. The preferred during this stage extrovert forms of humor can serve, for instance, expressing aggression in a socially acceptable way, verifying one's own position in a peer group, and the establishment of ties. Overcoming the crisis of integrity *versus* despair that appears in old age should become easier with the use of a humorous style of behaviour inclining

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12   Unfortunately, the Authors have restricted themselves to providing information about the studied age group (12-83 years), without supplementing it by the division into comparable age groups.

13   More precisely – first, they should be verified according to age groups that "in definition" fulfil different developmental tasks. This is necessary because apart from Charytonik (2009), in the mentioned studies groups that, for instance, would correspond formally to a given developmental period, including early adulthood with the later stages of life (Chen & Martin compared persons over 22 years of age with younger persons, Martin and colleagues looked for differences between groups up to age 19 and above 25 year of age, whereas Romero and his team compared individuals aged 17-25 years with persons from 26 years old and above).

14   Understood more broadly than a mere character strength, the component of wisdom or the adaptive style of functioning, e.g., in accordance with the humorous behaviour model of Craik, Lampert and Nelson or also measured with the aid of the *HRL*.

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make concrete predictions regarding possible developmental changes in the strength and importance of the relations between aspects of humor and orientations towards achieving happiness.

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to reflecting on oneself and the world that have a tinge of humor and tolerance to them. It is characterised by bringing out and appreciating the humor potential present in situations and persons as well as the ability to look at one's life from an appropriate, critical but not fault-finding perspective. Exploring the role of given aspects of humor in the advantageous solving of developmental crises it would also be worth conducting longitudinal studies in order to eliminate the cohort effect.

The longitudinal studies to date of the predictors of ageing successfully (e.g., Vaillant, 2007) enable the following to be included therein: not smoking or giving up smoking at a young age (below 45 years of age), mature defence mechanisms (e.g., humor), not abusing alcohol, a healthy weight, stable marriage, regular physical exercise and a high level of education. The studies conducted on the changes connected with age in the intensity of humor understood as a character strength have revealed that although young adults generally obtain higher results than senior citizens (Peterson & Park, 2007; Ruch et al., 2010a), however, in the sixth decade of life a subsequent increase in the intensity of this competence can be observed (Ruch et al., 2010b). Perhaps this results from the fact that adaptive coping strategies are slowly formed and worked out and at the same time the simultaneous weakening with age of nonadaptive defences (Vaillant, 2007; cf. also Erickson & Feldstein, 2007; Ruch et al., 2010a). Also the socioemotional selectivity theory maintains that the ability to effectively regulate the quality of emotions – enhancing positive affect and extinguishing the negative one – increases with age. Thus, many people in late adulthood, provided that the outcome of their overall evaluation of their own achievements was positive, "reach a specific distance to life, and create in themselves a type of inner cheerfulness of the spirit" (Janiszewska-Rain, 2005, p. 605). Effective emotional self-control seems to be particularly necessary at this stage, comparable, due to the potential encumbrances (revision of identity) and threats (acceptance of losses or its lack), to adolescence (Janiszewska-Rain, 2005). In the context of the above, the following question arises: Can and to what extent effective emotional regulation be performed in late adulthood with the aid of humor? What aspects (styles) of humor can compensate the unavoidable and unfavourable influence of age? When searching for the answers to these questions, it would be worth checking which components of humor do seniors use to cope with the specific, attributed to the final phase of life, problems like: deterioration of the psychological and physical condition and loss of control over one's own body, going on retirement and possessing a smaller income, the narrowing down of social contacts giving rise to the feeling of loneliness, increased dependence on others, a sense of being useless and set aside and left on the "margins" of life, etc. (op. cit.; cf. also Steuden, 2011). Information about the dimensions of humor determining the effective adaptation to old age could be put to practical use. On their basis, intervention programmes improving aspects of humor that support positive ageing could be devised and implemented (e.g., in Pensioner's Clubs, at Universities of the Third Age, in Retirement and Nursing Homes, etc.).

In reference to the study of Kuiper and colleagues (2010), it would be worth taking into consideration in further research other, within the field of emotional experiences that have been derived from the family home, possible determinants of the intensity of humor styles in adulthood. The role, for instance, of the attachment styles remembered from childhood of the mother or father to the respondent, their parental attitudes and parenting styles would definitely be worth exploring in the context of the ways of using humor. Of course, it would also require research on whether and how the remembered impact of the mother and father and humor styles affects the later level of life satisfaction and/or happiness.

Summing up, a positive development in adulthood requires the conscious use of the possibilities and chances arising in its subsequent stages and minimising the risk accompanying them. The findings to date from research on the role of humor as a competence supporting subjective well-being encourage undertaking further analysis of its contribution to enhancing also the developmental potential present in adulthood and counteracting its threats.

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