

Research article

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Self-defeating Humor Offline and Online: Ontological Predictors and Links with Self-Attitude among Young People

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Abstract

Introduction. Self-defeating humor is a person's humiliation of self through jokes or actions. Self-defeating humor is a common thing in interpersonal communication (offline) and in Internet communication (online) among young people. Humor is a mirror of self-attitude. We suggest that the preference for a self-defeating humor style is associated with a negative self-attitude, and it is an attempt to protect oneself with a "mask", including a "False Self", or with actual psychological problems. **Purpose of the study** is to identify the ontological predictors of the choice of a self-defeating humor style and to define its links with self-attitude and self-esteem. **Methods.** There were 174 respondents, the average age was 19.2 years. We used Humor Styles Questionnaire by R. Martin; psychometric method «Ontological security» by N.V. Kopteva; self-attitude test questionnaire by S. R. Pantileev; Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (RSES) (Russian adaptation by A. A. Zolotareva); a questionnaire to specify how people use self-defeating humor in communication and behavior. We used correlation analysis and regression analysis to process the results. **Results.** Self-defeating humor has significant negative correlations with the general level of ontological security, self-worth and self-esteem. Self-defeating humor has significant positive correlations with the "False Self", internal conflict and self-blame. Regression analysis revealed that the first model with the variable "False Self" explains the variability of the use of self-defeating humor by 34.6%, the second model with the variable "False Self" and the variable of self-blame has a higher coefficient of determination and explains the variability of self-defeating humor by 37.4%. **Discussion.**

The preferment of self-defeating humor style is affected by a low level of ontological security, negative self-attitude and low self-esteem. Self-defeating humor may indicate negative experiences associated with a lack of self-worth, self-condemnation, self-rejection, lack of inner support and connections with other people. Self-defeating humor through jokes or memes is a way to release of accumulated inner tension.

Keywords

self-defeating humor style, Self-defeating humor, humor styles, ontological security, self-attitude, self-worth, self-blame, self-esteem, False Self

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Introduction

Self-defeating humor style destroys the personality of the humorist. Although a moment of humiliating self-mockery may seem like the best way to save his identity.

Humor is one of the most important aspects of life (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009), and humor allows us to express ourselves in different ways. Encouraging others, oneself, overcoming difficulties and conflicts, sharing values, building and maintaining relationships (or destroying relationships) with other people, expressing oneself through creativity – humor is associated with all aspects of life (Ivanova, Enikolopov & Mitina, 2014; Leist & Müller, 2013; Martin, 2009; Lavreshina & Dikaya, 2016). R. Martin (2009) identifies 4 types of humor: adaptive – affiliative and self-supportive, and maladaptive – aggressive and self-defeating types of humor. Maladaptive humor styles damage an individual's relationships with society and with himself.

Self-defeating humor

Self-defeating humor style is the humor "at the expense of one's self" (Cortello, 2019). Jokes or actions of a self-defeating humorist are directed against oneself (Ivanova et al., 2013). So, a young people who favors a self-defeating style of humor can:

1. Tell others something funny about their own weaknesses, mistakes, personal qualities or failures in order to provoke an emotional response from them;
2. Provoke situations that expose them to ridicule, intentionally expose themselves as the object of jokes;
3. "Clowning", exposing themselves as a "fool" or buffoon in the team and maintaining an assumed cheerfulness at the moment of self-defeating jokes or actions;
4. Support critical remarks or aggressive jokes of other people in their direction;
5. Save memes and self-defeating jokes on personal pages in social networks and send self-defeating memes to friends. Examples of self-defeating memes are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Examples of self-defeating memes

What do I have in common with my laptop:

1. We are terribly slow.
2. We can't turn on after sleep mode.
3. We cannot complete the basic tasks.



**What do I have in common with
my laptop:**

- 1. We are terribly slow.**
- 2. We can't turn on after sleep
mode.**
- 3. We cannot complete the basic
tasks.**



**I am a genuine
pearl !!!**



im at the
rock bottom

Self-defeating humor is an individual's humiliation of themselves (Cortello, 2019), "ingratiating" themselves to others in order to gain their recognition (Zhang et al., 2021; Martin, 2009) and approval at the expense of their own reputation (Sergeev et al., 2012). A self-defeating humor style is maladaptive and prevents close and sincere contact with others (Meyer et al., 2017; Tucker et al., 2014). However, unlike other styles of humor, self-defeating humor may act as a defensive response to avoid dealing with particular social problems or to hide negative feelings hurt by communication (Kester, 2021, Shaikh & Vyas, 2022; Sergeev et al., 2012). In the short term, self-defeating jokes help with relieving the tension that comes with communication (Hazova, 2012). But in the long run, self-defeating humor can increase feelings of loneliness and insignificance, negatively affect an individual's self-image and self-worth (Zhang et al., 2021). Self-defeating humor may increase suicidal ideation – in fact, it's a self-destructive style of humor (Tucker et al., 2014) (even though it's an unintentional self-destruction) (Baumeister & Scher, 1988).

Ontological security

How is it possible that for the sake of seeking the approval of others, a person resorts to self-defeating humor, a form of self-destructive behavior? R. D. Laing writes that the reason for ingratiating oneself to others is fear: "...for why else would anyone act in accordance with anyone else's intentions rather than his own" (Laing, 1995, p. 46). Is it a true human desire: to humiliate oneself with jokes in order to build relationships with other people? Or are we dealing with a facade of personality that protects a person's True Self?

The use of defensive denial, lack of self-worth, loss of vital contact with people and the world, experiencing deep anxieties, and feeling "more dead than alive" are characteristics of the ontologically insecure individual (Kopteva, 2009, p. 1; Kopteva, 2010a; Kopteva, 2010b; Baumeister & Scher, 1988). Ontological security, on the other hand, is a person's experience of "self" as alive and valuable in this safe world "together", in unity with other people; it is the axiom of experiencing the wholeness of one's being (Kopteva, 2009). "True Self" of the ontologically secure individual experiences its integrity and autonomy. "False Self" experiences derealization, alienation from other people, loss of connection with the world (Oakes, 2021).

False Self

"False Self" – one of the ways a person can avoid being themselves (Laing, 1995). "False Self" becomes fixed when the individual chooses to act in accordance with the wants and needs of others instead of self-representation and self-expression in the world (maybe the person is acting out of fear or trying to protect themselves). "False Self" is alienated from other people and detached from Self. "False Self" tries to make contact with others by acting as a "mask" but will never achieve commonality with people and the world (Kopteva, 2017). "False Self" – is a marker of a person's disembodied and untrue existence.

Research problem

If a person's humor is a "mirror" of their self-attitude (Zhambulova, 2019, p. 64), can we say that there are hidden intrapersonal processes behind the choice of humor style? We want to examine whether self-defeating humor is related to negative self-attitude and low self-esteem of individuals and whether low ontological security is a predictor of it. And if self-defeating humor is a form of "defensive denial that allows one to hide negative feelings or avoid constructive problem solving" (Sergeev et al., 2012, p. 75), is self-defeating humor related to the "False Self"? We suggest that preference for a self-defeating humor style is negatively related to self-attitude and self-esteem, and that the predictor of humor style choice is an increased manifestation of the "False Self" (which is a reflection of low ontological security).

Aim of the study is to determine whether low ontological security is a predictor of choosing a self-defeating style of humor and to identify its links to self-attitude and self-esteem.

Methods

Sample

The total number of respondents was 174. The average age was 19.2 years. In the total sample there were 17 men (10% of the sample), 157 women (90% of the sample). Respondents participated in the survey by voluntary choice.

Methodology

We used the following diagnostic methods:

1. Questionnaire to clarify how people use self-defeating humor. The questionnaire was based on a literature review and interviews of young people who prefer self-defeating humor style. For each of the questionnaire statements the respondent expressed the degree of occurrence on a scale from 1 ("Rarely") to 10 ("Often").

Questionnaire

1. I make jokes about my actions, personality traits, or characteristics in the company of friends or peers;
2. I make jokes about myself to attract attention in the company of friends or peers;
3. I feel good when my joke on myself gets the company's attention and builds rapport with people;
4. I joke about myself during the conversation to avoid talking about my true feelings or thoughts;

5. Sometimes I think I destroy myself with my jokes;
6. I'd rather make jokes about myself than others make jokes about me;
7. I make myself look like a buffoon or clown on purpose;
8. The image of a buffoon helps me to favor other people towards me;
9. I actually feel bad when I realize that all my self-jokes and cheerfulness throughout the day was an illusion;
10. I make cruel or rude jokes about myself to amuse the company;
11. I'm a terrible person;
12. Life would be easier if I wasn't me;
13. I'm attracted to self-deprecating, depressing memes;
14. When I feel bad, I humiliate myself even more.

2. Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) by R. Martin to identify the dominant style of humor;

3. Psychometric method "Ontological security" (OS(PM)) (N.V. Kopteva);

4. Self-attitude test questionnaire by S. R. Pantileev;

5. Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (RSES) (Russian adaptation by A. A. Zolotareva).

We collected data through Google Forms. The calculation of quantitative data was performed in Excel program; mathematical processing of data was performed in SPSS Statistica 27. We applied nonparametric Spearman's criterion and regression analysis.

Results

Self-defeating humor and ontological security: correlation analysis

The first step of the analysis – to find out the strength of the correlation between the use of self-defeating humor and ontological security.

Correlation analysis using Spearman's criteria showed that there were statistically significant correlations with all scales of the psychometric method "Ontological security" and the scale of self-defeating style of humor. The results are presented in Table 1.

Self-defeating humor style has a significant negative correlation with the general level of ontological security ($-0.377, p \leq 0.01$) and autonomy ($-0.304, p \leq 0.01$). Correlations of self-defeating humor are also found with the scales of "Vital Contact with the World" ($-0.264, p \leq 0.01$), and "Vital Contact with People" ($-0.187, p \leq 0.05$).

The main result is the significant positive correlation of self-defeating humor with the "False Self" scale ($0.560, p \leq 0.01$).

Table 1

Correlations of the "Self-defeating humor" scale of the Humor Styles Questionnaire with the scales of the "Ontological security" methodology

Scales	Self-defeating humor
General ontological security	-,377**
Vital contacts with the world	-,264**
Vital contacts with people	-,187*
Autonomy	-,304**
False Self	,560**

Note: ** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-sided), * correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-sided).

The results show that the more pronounced the ontological insecurity, the more a person will use self-defeating humor. The stronger the sense of pointlessness, the lack of self-worth, the feeling of being "more dead than alive" in the inner experience of the individual – the more self-humiliation there will be in jokes or actions. Disconnection with other people, dependency on circumstances (low autonomy) will also contribute to a preference for a destructive style of humor.

Correlations of the scales "Vital contacts with the world" and "Vital contacts with people" are rather weak. Experiencing "feeling at home in the world", experiencing oneself "together with other people in the world" is not closely related to the use of self-defeating humor.

The connection between self-defeating humor and the "False Self" is strong. Feeling of inner emptiness and detachment from one's own body, behavior and "Self" in the inner experience of a person, the discrepancy between his real Self and the behavior transmitted outwardly increases the probability of choosing self-defeating humor for one's jokes.

Self-defeating humor and self-attitude: correlation analysis

The second stage is the study of the strength of correlations between the scale of self-defeating humor and self-attitude (according to the Test-questionnaire of self-attitude of S. R. Pantelev). The results of correlation analysis using Spearman's criteria are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Correlations of the "Self-defeating humor" scale of the Humor Styles Questionnaire with the scales of Test-questionnaire of self-attitude

Scales	Self-defeating humor
Internal honesty	-,359**
Self-confidence	-,402**
Self-guidance	-,353**
Reflective Self-Relationship	-,400**
Self-worth	-,439**
Self-acceptance	-,223**
Self-attachment	-,222**
Internal conflict	,447**
Self-blame	,460**

Note: ** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-sided), * correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-sided).

The scale of self-defeating humor has significant negative correlations with positive aspects of self-attitude such as:

- Internal honesty (-0,359, $\rho \leq 0,01$),
- Self-confidence (-0,402, $\rho \leq 0,01$),
- Self-guidance (-0,353, $\rho \leq 0,01$),
- Reflective Self-Relationship (-0,400, $\rho \leq 0,01$),
- Self-worth (-0,439, $\rho \leq 0,01$).

Weak negative correlations were found with self-acceptance ($-0.223, p \leq 0.01$) and self-attachment ($-0.222, p \leq 0.01$).

Significant positive correlations of self-defeating style of humor were found with such negative aspects of self-attitude as internal conflict ($0.447, p \leq 0.01$) and self-blame ($0.460, p \leq 0.01$).

The tendency to use a self-defeating humor style in communication is related to the specifics of self-attitude. The less the person feels the value of one's own personality, life, and activities, and the less one believes in the value of one's self to others, the more one will be inclined to use self-defeating humor. Significant negative correlation with self-worth is the most important. Excessive use of self-defeating humor may be a marker of destructive experiences of self insignificance and lack of self-value. The more likely a person's internal description of themselves as insecure, non-self-sufficient, lazy – the more likely the person might use self-defeating jokes. The less one believes that their personality, character, activities are capable of respect, sympathy, approval, and understanding from others – the more often they will resort to self-abasement through humor (devaluing their experiences and achievements and demeaning their personality). Passivity and lack of confidence in their own ability to change their lives will also contribute to a higher incidence of self-humiliation.

A pile of negative experiences toward one's self is associated with the use of self-defeating humor. The higher a person's experience of internal conflicts, doubts, disagreement with oneself, anxiety and depression accompanied by feelings of guilt, the more he or she will be inclined to use self-defeating humor. Blaming oneself for one's own failures also contributes to the manifestation of self-humiliation.

The antipodes of self-acceptance can also be manifested through the use of self-defeating humor. However, the relationship of self-acceptance and self-defeating humor is not as significant as the relationship of self-defeating humor and self-worth. Psychotherapy with young people who overuse self-defeating humor should primarily focus on reinforcing or building the person's basic self-worth.

Self-defeating humor and Self-esteem: correlation analysis

Next, we determined the strength of the correlation between the use of self-defeating humor and a measure of self-esteem using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

Correlation analysis using Spearman's criterion showed that the use of self-defeating humor had a significant negative correlation with the self-esteem score ($-0.473, p \leq 0.01$). The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Correlations of the Self-defeating humor scale of the Humor Styles Questionnaire and Self-esteem scale

Scale	Self-defeating humor
Self-esteem	-,473**

Note: ** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-sided), * correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-sided).

The lower one's self-esteem, the more one is inclined to use self-defeating humor.

Self-defeating humor and specifics of its use (questionnaire): correlation analysis

As an indirect assessment of the display of self-defeating humor in real life we used the method of correlations – using Spearman's criteria we determined the correlation with the respondents' evaluation of the questionnaire statements.

Table 4 shows that all the scores of the statements have statically significant positive correlations with self-defeating humor at $p \leq 0.01$. The statements of the questionnaire are a reflection of the real behavior of people using self-defeating humor.

Table 4

Correlations of the Self-defeating humor scale of the Humor Styles Questionnaire and evaluation of the questionnaire statements

Questionnaire statements	Self-defeating humor
I make jokes about my actions, personality traits, or characteristics in the company of friends or peers,	,548**
I make jokes about myself to attract attention in the company of friends or peers;	,529**
I feel good when my joke on myself gets the company's attention and builds rapport with people;	,506**
I joke about myself during the conversation to avoid talking about my true feelings or thoughts;	,440**
Sometimes I think I destroy myself with my jokes;	,463**

Questionnaire statements	Self-defeating humor
I'd rather make jokes about myself than others make jokes about me;	,389**
I make myself look like a buffoon or clown on purpose;	,523**
The image of a buffoon helps me to favor other people towards me;	,573**
I actually feel bad when I realize that all my self-jokes and cheerfulness throughout the day was an illusion;	,451**
I make cruel or rude jokes about myself to amuse the company;	,565**
I'm a terrible person;	,386**
Life would be easier if I wasn't me;	,413**
I'm attracted to self-deprecating, depressing memes;	,430**
When I feel bad, I humiliate myself even more.	,448**

Note: ** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-sided), * correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-sided).

Statements 1–3 and statement 10: person who uses self-defeating humor in familiar company uses his or her actions, personality traits, or characteristics as the object of mockery for the sake of attracting attention. When such a mockery succeeds in making the members of the company laugh, the mocker feels "good", gets satisfaction, although he can joke about himself both cruelly and rudely.

Statements 7 and 8: a person who uses self-defeating humor is willing to consciously choose the role of buffoon or "clown" in order to gain favor with others. The buffoonery and cheerfulness may end up being a sham (statement 9), and the humorist gradually destroys himself with jokes (statement 5), humorist at the end of the day feels like a terrible person (statement 11) who wishes he could stop being himself (statement 12) – and those feelings only leads to even deeper self-deprecation (statement 14).

The following statements have the most significant correlations with self-defeating humor: 5. Sometimes I think I destroy myself with my jokes, 9. I actually feel bad when I realize that all my self-jokes and cheerfulness throughout the day was an illusion, 11. I'm a terrible person, 12. Life would be easier if I wasn't me, 13. I'm attracted to self-deprecating, depressing memes; 14. When I feel bad, I humiliate myself even more.

Specific characteristics of self-defeating humor (questionnaire statements) and Self-attitude, Self-esteem, ontological aspects: correlation analysis

We analyzed the correlations between the scores of 14 statements of our questionnaire and the scales of 1) Self-attitude test questionnaire, 2) psychometric methodic "Ontological security" and 3) Rosenberg's self-esteem scale. Correlation analysis using Spearman's criteria showed the large number of correlations. Table 5 shows only statistically significant correlations with a coefficient higher than 0.3.

Table 5
Evaluation of the questionnaire statements and aspects of self-attitude, self-esteem and ontological aspects

Scales / Questionnaire statements	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	Self-attitude test questionnaire													
Internal honesty									-.369**		-.312**		-.326**	
Self-confidence									-.309**		-.317**	-.387**	-.335**	-.392**
Self-guidance											-.327**	-.361**	-.339**	-.373**
Reflective Self-Relationship						-.317**			-.330**		-.335**	-.360**	-.358**	-.302**
Self-worth					-.323**				-.362**		-.430**	-.360**	-.378**	-.421**
Self-acceptance														-.339**

Scales / Questionnaire statements	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Self-attachment									-.315**		-.334**	-.352**		-.367**
Internal conflict				.321**	.316**				.414**		.390**	.451**	.392**	.484**
Self-blame				.367**	.345**	.352**	.309**		.505**		.569**	.534**	.483**	.582**
Psychometric method "Ontological security" (OS(PM)) (N.V. Kopteva);														
General ontological security				-.385**	-.433**	-.375**	-.426**	-.327**	-.458**	-.352**	-.475**	-.556**	-.516**	-.541**
Vital contacts with the world					-.340**		-.342**		-.352**		-.385**	-.493**	-.476**	-.463**
Vital contacts with people							-.340**		-.309**		-.320**	-.414**	-.402**	-.367**
Autonomy		-.307**			-.318**	-.336**	-.373**		-.348**	-.333**	-.334**	-.444**	-.398**	-.495**
False Self			.442**		.442**	.360**	.348**	.340**	.516**	.361**	.528**	.538**	.533**	.525**
Rosenberg's self-esteem scale														
Self-esteem	-.317**			-.377**	-.394**	-.380**	-.365**	-.393**	-.429**	-.347**	-.501**	-.519**	-.447**	-.538**

Note: ** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-sided), * correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-sided).

According to the number and strength of correlations we can see that such scales as Internal conflict, Self-blame, General ontological security, False Self and Self-esteem are most related to the scores of the questionnaire statements. These results confirm that the questionnaire clarify and enrich the characteristics of self-defeating humor and the feelings behind it.

Ontological security, Self-attitude and Self-esteem: correlation analysis

The final step of correlation analysis using Spearman's criterion was to identify the relationships between the ontological security scales and self-esteem. Table 6 shows statistically significant correlations with a coefficient higher than 0.3.

Table 6

Correlations of the scales of the psychometric method "Ontological security", Self-attitude test questionnaire and Self-esteem scale

Scales	General ontological security	Vital contacts with the world	Vital contacts with people	Autonomy	False Self
Internal honesty					-,425**
Self-confidence	,518**	,515**	,378**	,449**	-,547**
Self-guidance	,523**	,543**	,405**	,467**	-,414**
Reflective Self-Relationship	,470**	,403**	,418**	,357**	-,502**
Self-worth	,489**	,352**	,385**	,418**	-,529**
Self-acceptance					
Self-attachment	,374**	,445**		,345**	-,347**
Internal conflict	-,467**	-,407**		-,406**	,633**
Self-blame	-,466**	-,410**		-,411**	,569**
Self-esteem	,710**	,673**	,488**	,694**	-,607**

Note: ** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-sided), * correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-sided).

Many statistically significant correlations were found between almost all scales of Self-attitude test questionnaire and the method "Ontological security", except for the self-acceptance scale.

«False Self» has the strongest correlations as follows: negative medium strength correlations with self-confidence ($-0.547, \rho \leq 0.01$), self-worth ($-0.529, \rho \leq 0.01$), positive medium strength correlations with internal conflict ($0.633, \rho \leq 0.01$) and self-blame ($0.569, \rho \leq 0.01$).

Regression analysis

To find ontological predictors of self-defeating humor and to test the hypothesis that self-defeating humor is influenced by increased "False Self", self-blame and intrapersonal conflict, we applied multiple regression analysis using the stepwise inclusion method. The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 7.

Table 7
Results of the regression analysis

N ^o	R ²	Model	Coefficients ^a		t	Value
			Unstandardized coefficients	Standardized coefficients		
			B	Std. error	Beta	
1	,346	(Const.)	11,054	1,714		6,448 ,000
		False Self	,793	,083	,588	9,545 ,000
2	,374	(Const.)	9,513	1,771		5,371 ,000
		False Self	,640	,098	,475	6,497 ,000
		Self-blame	,866	,313	,203	2,772 ,006

a. Dependent variable: Self-defeating humor

As a result of two iterations, it was found that self-defeating humor was significantly influenced by indicators such as False self and self-blame, while the indicator of intrapersonal conflict did not show a significant result and was excluded from both obtained models.

The first of the models contains only one variable, "False Self" which changes self-defeating humor by 0.793 when it changes by one unit. This variant of the model has a coefficient of determination of 0.346 and explains the variability of the dependent variable by 34.6%. The second model included, in addition to the variable "False Self", also a measure of self-blame, with a change of one unit changing the dependent variable by .866. At the same time, the weight of the "False Self" in this model has decreased by .640. This means that if a person has self-blame, their "False Self" has less influence on self-defeating humor. At the same time, this model has a higher coefficient of determination compared to the model containing only the "False Self" variable – 0.374. It explains the variability of self-defeating humor by 37.4%.

Discussion

Self-defeating humor and ontological security

The findings of the study confirmed the connection between the use of self-defeating humor and ontological security. Positive correlation between the "False Self" and the self-defeating humor confirms our hypothesis: the excessive use of self-defeating humor reflects the experience of ontological insecurity, alienation from Self, acting as a way of denial or avoidance of problems. Regression analysis confirmed that "False Self" as a component of ontological security contributes significantly to the choice of a specifically self-defeating style of humor. A person who uses self-defeating humor in interpersonal communication or Internet communication has a low level of ontological security.

During the pre-interview, one respondent said:

«My True Self is weaker than my False Self, and I don't really want to show it to anyone. Not many people are interested in me. And every time I reveal my True Self, I only get pain. So that's why the image [of buffoon] appeared.

The use of self-defeating humor is caused precisely by intrapersonal problems, the dynamics of self-relationship of the individual, but not by problems of relationships with other people (The scale "Vital contacts with people" did not show such significant correlations). In the questionnaire, statements related to a person's attitude to Self have significant relationships with all scales of the self-attitude, ontological security and self-esteem questionnaires. But statements related to the use of self-defeating humor in the company have much lower correlations with these scales. The social aspect of interaction

is not important itself to self-defeating humorists. Self-defeating humorists are not really looking to socialize or gain social approval with a good joke. The use of self-defeating humor is a way of stabilizing the psyche in the conditions when the False Self fails to compensate for low levels of ontological security; it is a way of protecting against low self-esteem, self-blame, and inner conflict.

As shown by Greenberg et al. (1992), self-esteem buffers anxiety under stressful conditions. Low ontological security generates background anxiety. False Self generally copes with it, but in stressful situations anxiety takes over and self-blame increases. The self-defeating humorist, in order to assuage anxiety and guilt, lowers his self-esteem in the outside world, devaluing himself as if to blow off steam. However, this devaluation creates a new circle of self-blame.

In speech self-defeating humor can realize communicative strategies of self-pity, buffoonery, self-maliciousness, and self-beating as negative manipulative communicative demonstrativeness (Tislenkova, 2024). Humorists are characterized by jokes about their actions and personality traits, about making a buffoon or clown of themselves on purpose for the sake of making others laugh.

Self-defeating humor and self-attitude

Ontological security is related to self-attitude; self-attitude is "a general global sense of 'for or against oneself'" (Kopteva, 2009, p. 7; Kopteva, 2011), and ontological security is a perceived world security and attachment to the world. In our study, we found a connection between the overall level of ontological security and all the parameters of self-attitude.

The strongest negative correlation of self-defeating humor was found with self-esteem, positive relationships were found with internal conflict and self-blame. Self-blame has a major contribution to the preference for self-defeating humor.

Self-defeating humor has a strong negative correlation with self-worth but a lower correlation with self-acceptance. In psychotherapy, it will be important to build on a basic, unconditional sense of a person's self-worth and to form a stable Self-Image based on it. Reliance on "acceptance" may not be effective until a stable, objective "True Self" has been created. As one respondent said: "How can I accept what is absent?".

Self-defeating humor "has a bad reputation" (Cortello, 2019). People who use self-defeating humor are characterized by insecurity, distancing themselves from problems, feelings of helplessness, increased self-blame (Hazova, 2012). A study of self-attitude among adolescents with different humor styles (Zhambulova, 2019) showed a predominance of negative self-attitude among those who use self-defeating humor. These findings are in line with the results of our study.

Other studies have found negative correlations of self-defeating humor with creative abilities (Cortello, 2019), quality of life, and psychological well-being (Ivanova et al., 2013).

The results of our study also relate to works that have found that self-defeating humor has a negative correlation with self-esteem (Ivanova et al., 2013; Shaikh & Vyas, 2022), quality of life and well-being and positive correlation with self-judgment, neuroticism, depression, external locus of control (Ivanova et al., 2013; Martin, 2009; Kester, 2021; Shaikh & Vyas, 2022), and anxiety, including social anxiety (Tucker et al., 2013). Self-defeating style of humor is related to feelings of insignificance, unimportance, and loneliness (MacDonald, Kumar & Schermer, 2020). When a person feels that they do not matter to others in their lives (Deas et al., 2023), they may resort to this style of humor.

Self-defeating humor is associated with a whole pile of negative emotions towards one's self, up to self-hatred (Omarova, 2021). The constant use of a self-defeating style of humor over time only reinforces the humorist's negative self-esteem due to the focus on their faults and weaknesses (Meyer et al., 2017; Rnic et al., 2016), whether or not these jokes amuse others.

Self-defeating humor is related to suicidal behavior (Tucker et al., 2014; Govorov & Ivanova, 2023; Hart & Richman, 2020). On the one hand, jokes about suicide allow to get around stigmatization and express one's experiences. On the other hand, the maladaptiveness of self-defeating humor leads to increased feelings of loneliness and social rejection (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009).

There is a growing interest in finding the correlation between self-defeating humor and affective disorders (Ivanova, Enikolopov & Mitina, 2014), especially smiling depression: in both cases, smiling acts as a mask to reduce the significance of inner feelings or to completely isolate one's True Self from others (Govorov & Ivanova, 2024).

The overuse of self-defeating humor is actually an admitting of one's own faults and a release of perceived incompleteness while communicating. Comparing oneself to others, especially when the self-image is not formed, leads to discomfort, stress and confusion. Lack of self-acceptance, self-awareness and authenticity leads to self-defeating humor. Self-defeating humor protects and hides true feelings (Martin et al., 2003; Barnett & Deutsch, 2016).

Correlation with the questionnaire statements

The conducted correlation analysis between the statements' scores and the "Self-defeating humor" scale has shown that all statements of our questionnaire can be used to explore self-defeating humor in detail. Manifestations of self-defeating through humor can be significant signs of low ontological security. Self-defeating humorists may be characterized by the experience of "self-destruction" by jokes, especially when they already feel bad; "pretending" daytime cheerfulness in the collective, as well as manifestations of the "False Self" ("Life would be easier if I wasn't me") against the background of a weakened "True Self" ("I am a terrible person").

In today's conditions of rapid digitalization, the amount of time young people spend on social media is increasing significantly (Astapenko, 2021), where it becomes possible to

express experiences through Internet-memes or relevant posts on personal pages – young people who prefer a self-defeating style of humor are also attracted to depressing memes.

Conclusion

Nowadays there is a passion for self-defeating humor among young people: there are a lot of Internet memes that emphasize one's weaknesses, demeaning life conditions or personal qualities. In offline communication in youth companies there are people who take on the role of a "clown" and buffoon: they expose their lives as the subject of jokes, willingly talk about failures in a humorous way, humiliate abilities and achievements in every possible way.

Behind the self-deprecating memes and making oneself a "clown" there are low levels of ontological security, a developed False Self, a high degree of self-blame and low self-esteem. Self-defeating humor is a "symptom" of negative self-attitude, including low self-worth, and low self-esteem.

The use of self-defeating humor creates a loop. When the humorist feels bad – he/she humiliates himself/herself even more, including in company, but then inevitably realizes that jokes on himself/herself were not real jokes, but a way to compensate destructive experiences of low self-esteem, alienation and his/her own internal conflict, and from this he/she feels subjectively worse. In our opinion, a way out of the loop is possible. Recognizing one's self-worth and reducing self-blame are the main targets of psychotherapy. The outcome of psychotherapy can be a state of experiencing one's true embodiment, a sense of self-worth by the very fact of life and birth. This state can be described as:

"Yes, I can exist and express myself in this world without judgment, I am valuable, and though it is difficult, I will do my best to live in alignment with my True Self!"

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Evgeny A. Pronenko critically revised the methodology of the article, critically revised the content of the article, prepared and wrote the text of the article, statistically processed the data, described and analyzed the results, and approved the version of the article for publication.

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Conflict of Interest Information

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.