Abstract

Prior findings support that a humor may function as a strategy to initiate and monitor social relationships (Li et al., 2009), furthermore may have significant contribution to physical and emotional health (Kuiper & Nicholl, 2004). Using humor in adaptive ways can be regarded as an efficient tool for controlling dysfunctional emotions and cultivating positive emotions (Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998; Fredrickson, 2001). Concerning the multifaceted nature of humor and the contextual specificity of it’s interpretation and use (Kuiper et al., 2004; Thorson & Powell, 1997), the main objective of current study was to provide insight into the psychometric qualities of the Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale (MSHS; Thorson & Powell, 1997) validated among Transylvanian Hungarian sample. We found that the instrument has good psychometric qualities among the examined sample.

Keywords: sense of humor, MSHS, content validity, internal consistency, construct validity

1. INTRODUCTION

Sense of humor is considered across all cultures as having a large role in the individual’s everyday life, especially in stressful situations (José et al., 2007). Humor may function as a strategy to initiate and monitor social relationships, so both sexes evolved in a way to produce and understand humor (Miller, 2000, 2001). What is more, conform with interest indicator theory both sexes generate and consider more positively humor when initially attracted to that person (Li et al, 2009). Moreover it has a substantial mediator function in marital satisfaction along with intelligence and other personality dimensions (Weisfeld, 2011). Prior evidence has suggested that humor may have significant contribution to physical, emotional health (Kuiper & Nicholl, 2004) and in adjustments to stressogenic events (Thorson & Powell, 1993; Kuiper et al., 2004). Furthermore, people with a good sense of humor may gain social gratification by providing amusement (Weisfeld et al., 2011) and deal successfully with stress using cognitive restructuring and positive re-evaluation (Lefcourt, 2001; Abel, 2008; Artemyeva, 2013). Using humor in adaptive ways can be regarded as an efficient tool for controlling dysfunctional emotions and cultivating positive emotions (Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998; Fredrickson, 2001).

Martin (2007) suggests that uses of humor is universal among individuals in all social domains, and requires comprehensive explanation. Individual’s sense of humor encompasses multiple components, such as acknowledgement of oneself and others as humorous, appreciation of humor, laughter or coping humor, all of which may vary across context and individual differences. Concerning the multidimensional nature of humor (Kuiper et al., 2004; Thorson & Powell, 1997), the overall aim of the current study was to provide insight into the psychometric qualities of the Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale (MSHS; Thorson & Powell, 1997) validated among Transylvanian Hungarian sample.

2. METHOD

2.1. Participants

Participants were 278 Transylvanian Hungarian speaking, adult volunteers, from a diversified background, with everyone having high school education or greater. There were 224 female (80.6%) and 54 male (19.4%) respondents, with age between 18 and 67, mean participant age was29.42 (SD=9.63). Considering marital status,
25.5% of the respondents were single, 46.8% were in a committed relationship, 24.5% were married and one person was widowed. The majority of them originated from urban area (77.7%) and reported to be heterosexual (94.6%). All of them gave informed consent of their participation after the presentation of brief information related to the study’s general objective.

2.2. Measures

The Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale (MSHS; Thorson & Powell, 1997) is a widely used instrument for the comprehensive measure of the multi-facet aspects of humor. Originally it was designed to capture several dimensions of humor, but the final factorial structure reveals four independent factors: (1) humor production and creativity; (2) coping humor; (3) attitudes toward humor and humorous persons; and (4) appreciation of humor, explaining 61.5% of the variance. The scale is composed by 24 items (eighteen positively-and six negatively-phrased items), the scoring goes from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) with possible global score between 0 and 96, having a Cronbach’s alpha of.92 (José et al., 2007). The instrument was translated to several languages and used in many studies related to psychological well-being (Thorson, Powell, Sarmany-Schuller, & Hampes, 1997), to adaptive function of humor in reducing anxiety (José & Parreira et al., 2007; Bennett et al., 2003).

2.3. Procedures

The purpose of this study was to establish the aspect validity and analyze the reliability and construct validity of MSHS. After we obtain the author’s permission to use the scale on the target population, as a first step we performed the translation of the instrument and applied the final version via online format. Participants received information regarding the correct use of the scale and gave their consent to participate in this survey. We guarantee the confidentiality of their personal data and the anonymity of the responses. In the end, we obtained 278 correctly completed questionnaires, followed by testing the psychometric properties of the instrument, evaluating internal consistency, descriptive analysis and empirical testing of construct’s fit to theoretical model.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Face validity

We established the aspect validity of the MSHS through proposed methodological steps in literature (Borsa et al., 2012; Sousa & Rojjanasrirat, 2010). The translation of the measure was performed by two independent bilingual translators, the first synthesized version were evaluated by two expert psychologists, with extra care of linguistic and contextual aspects of the item’s formulation. Semantic and idiomatic equivalence were discussed to verify whether the items and instructions were comprehensible for the target population. After the back-translation of the scale, the pre-final version was tested in a pilot study.

3.2. Construct validity of the MSHS

As shown in Table 1, principal components factor analysis with Varimax rotation reveals four independent dimensions, that explained 60.91% of the total variance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Number and Content</th>
<th>Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m confident that I can make other people laugh.</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Other people tell me that I say funny things.funny things.</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I can often crack people up with the things that...the things that I say.</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I can say things in such a way as to make... makopelaugh.megnevettetiazemereket.</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I’m regarded as something of a wit by my...by my friends.</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. My clever sayings amuse others.</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Uses of wit or humor help me master difficult...</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Coping by using humor is an elegant way...</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Humor helps me cope.</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Uses of humor help to put me at ease.</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13. Humor is a lousy coping mechanism.*  .59
6. I can use wit to help adapt to many situations.  .56
8. People who tell jokes are a pain in the neck. *  .79
10. I like a good joke.  .60
11. Calling someone a “comedian” is a real insult.*  .69
16. I’m uncomfortable when everyone is cracking… *  .76
4. I dislike comics.*  .77
19. Trying to master situations through uses of...*  .53
14. People look to me to say amusing things.  .60
1. Sometimes I think up jokes or funny stories.funny stories.  .57
22. I use humor to entertain my friends.  .68
7. I can ease a tense situation by saying something...funny.…  .56
20. I can actually have some control over a group...  .51

Explain variance (%): 60.91% 19.52% 14.80% 14.12% 12.53%


With exception of the humor appreciation factor, we found the first three dimensions to be conceptually equivalent with those proposed by the original model. The first factor contains items related to humor production, with item saturation above 0.66 and explaining 19.52% of the total variance. The second - coping humor and third - attitude toward humor factor included items with level of saturation between 0.53 and 0.80, explaining 14.80% respectively 14.12% of the total variance. Thanks to the cultural peculiarity, the five items that make up the fourth identified factor - social use of humor, originally belonging to the first dimension, in our sample explains 12.53% of the variance in the rotated matrix. As a result of factor analysis, in our study sample the original humor appreciation dimension got eliminated because the 10.item contributes to the third factor and 14.item shows very low (.39) saturation related to first factor. In the end, MSHS is composed of twenty-three items.

3.3. Descriptive characteristics and Reliability of the MSHS

Looking at the descriptive statistics of the 23 items, the highest mean was produced by the tenth item (M=3.56, SD=0.65), while the first item shows the lowest mean value (M=1.71, SD=1.19). As shown in Table 2, the minimum and maximum values obtained for the items ranged between 15 and 92, the total MSHS presents a mean value of M=64.33, SD= 12.82.

Table 2: Minimum and Maximum Values, Means, Standard Deviations and Cronbach’s alpha values of MSHS factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale (N=278)</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MSHS total</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>92.00</td>
<td>64.33</td>
<td>12.82</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor production</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24.00</td>
<td>16.74</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptive Humor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24.00</td>
<td>17.17</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes toward Humor</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>24.00</td>
<td>19.71</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social use of Humor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>10.71</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Internal consistency analysis reveals very good Cronbach’s alpha values on the global score as well as for the MSHS factors. As noted in Table 2, first factor attained Cronbach’s alpha of .87, the second .86, the third.80 whereas the fourth factor .84. The produced internal consistency value for the overall MSHS was of .90, results that are comparable to the findings presented by scale’s authors. Additional statistical analysis shows that the internal consistency value won’t increase even if certain items were to be deleted. High correlation coefficient (r=.86) got from the split-half method also confirms the reliability of the MSHS.

Table 3: Correlations among Factors in the MSHS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>F1</th>
<th>F2</th>
<th>F3</th>
<th>F4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F1-Humor production</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2-Adaptive Humor</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F3-Attitudes toward Humor</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F4-Social use of Humor</td>
<td>.70**</td>
<td>.59**</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * p < .05; ** p < .01
We found moderate to high correlations among items and factors in the scale, with the first factor having correlations between $r=.74$ and $r=.84$, the second between $r=.62$ and $r=.84$, the third between $r=.57$ and $r=.81$, and finally the fourth factor presenting Pearson $r$ correlation coefficients ranged between $r=.67$ and $r=.85$. Every item belongs to the factor where it has the highest correlation, proving the validity of the scale. The statistically significant inter-correlations among different dimensions suggest the independence of the humor factors (Table 3).

We found no relationship between age and sense of humor factors ($r= -.014$, $p=.822$; $r= .103$, $p=.860$, $r= -.111$, $p=.664$; $r= .009$, $p=.885$), respectively total MSHS score ($r= .001$, $p=.985$), but statistically significant differences were identified between the gender of the respondents and the global MSHS score ($t= 2.574(91.30)$, $p=.012$), the first ($t= 4.603(90.64)$, $p=.000$) respective the fourth ($t= 4.664(92.24)$, $p=.000$) dimension of the scale, with higher mean values for male participants.

One-way Anova and post-hoc analysis shows significant differences regarded marital status at the level of global score ($F= 2.924(4)$, $p=.022$), humor production ($F= 2.712(4)$, $p=.030$) and using humor as a coping mechanism ($F= 3.384(4)$, $p=.010$). Thus, compared to single, divorced or respondents in a relationship, participants who were married report significant higher mean values in these dimensions. We also found a higher level of adaptive humor ($F= 5.201(3)$, $p=.002$) and positive attitude toward humor and humorous persons ($F= 3.528(3)$, $p=.015$) among individuals with a master level degree.

4. DISCUSSION

The main goal of current paper was to evaluate the quantitative indices of validity and reliability concerning the MSHS validated among Transylvanian Hungarian individuals. Factor analysis results emphasized minor differences in our four-component structure (explains 60.91 % of the total variance) compared to the original, with sample specific differences regarded representation of the first and the fourth dimension. The content validity was also proved by the correlations among items and dimensions. The global mean values for the MSHS in our study ($M= 2.79$) are similar to ones attained by the measure's author ($M= 2.91$). We found very good Cronbach’s alpha values for the 23 MSHS item ($\alpha=.90$). The first factor- humor production presents a Cronbach’s alpha of .87, the second- adaptive humor .86, the third- attitude toward humor .80 and the fourth-humor used to achieve social goals .84.

Since we found no relationship between sense of humor factors and age, but sex differences in overall sense of humor, humor production, social use of humor were identified, with higher levels on these dimensions for male participants, our results confirm the findings of original validation study (Thorson & Powell, 1993b). Furthermore, a good sense of humor and increased adaptive humor among married individuals support the enhanced contribution of humor in long-term relationship maintainance and higher marital satisfaction (Weisfeld et al., 2011).

According to the statistical analysis, that scale can be considered valid and reliable instrument for the multidimensional measure of sense of humor, presenting good psychometric criteria and factorial structure among the examined sample.

5. REFERENCES


