

Stay Calm and Use Humor: Multidisciplinary Antecedents / Editorial:¹

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It has often been said that stress is ubiquitous. For certain, there are times when it can feel like we are bombarded by a seemingly endless onslaught of news headlines associated with violence, hatred, xenophobia, prejudice or stereotyping, political careerism/extremism, and environmental degradation. Compounding this, we are also confronted by our own stressors, whether major work, family or health related events, or hassles of an everyday nature. As a result, we may become so overwhelmed that we struggle to cope; in the end, we become numb or ill. Even in situations where we are relatively stress free, it may be difficult to find a personal philosophy for achieving direction, well-being, or happiness. In other words, it may be insurmountable to find a match, fit, or congruence between the personal resources we have at the moment, and the demands we are striving to meet and/or overcome. Despite this, there are various problem-solving and emotion based weapons in our personal and social coping arsenal that may help us. For example, some may be tempted to cope by adopting a ‘stoic face’ somewhat akin to the mindset articulated by Marcus Aurelius, the great Roman ‘philosopher king’ (Aurelius, trans. 2006; *Meditations*): “Be like the headland against which the waves break and break: it stands firm, until presently the watery tumult around it subsides once more to rest.”

But the stoic approach is not sufficient nor is it the only option for seeking health or happiness when faced with a threat. Other personal approaches have been theorized and tested by psychologists and related social scientists. For example, the 1970s gave rise to a plethora of research related to those dispositional variables that purportedly buffer us from stress, such as a hardy attitude (Kobasa, 1979), a sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1987), optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1985), and of course, humor and laughter (Martin, 2007). As an extension, we are also currently witnessing a rise in the field of positive psychology, which focuses on positive individual traits and “valued subjective experiences” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychologists study an array of topics such as virtue and character (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), flourishing (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005), time perspective (Zimbardo &

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Boyd, 1999), and gratitude (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000). For example, research by Christopher Peterson and colleagues (2007) have linked such character strengths as humor, self-regulation, bravery, and spirituality, to various happiness motives as well as life satisfaction. Other related research by Veronika Huta and Richard Ryan (2010) suggests that living life both eudaimonically and hedonically, that is, the ‘full life,’ is the best option for enhancing well-being. To be sure, something is to be said for the pursuit of meaning coupled with a hedonic lifestyle. The World War II experiences of Victor Frankl (1963) at the hands of the Nazis should serve as a dark reminder of this, that is, to live life with a purpose. From an Epicurean vantage point, pleasure also appears to add to this equation. However, we should not be fooled into uncritically and ‘wholly’ adopting such a person-based approach to life. In a world partly characterized by strife, it may be easy or tempting to view one’s circumstances as unpredictable, negative, or uncontrollable. As such, it may pay dividends to develop or cultivate a resilient disposition that may help to ‘innoculate’ us from, or to rise above, such challenges. However, as members of the academy or as readers interested in the critical study, appreciation, and application of humor, we also need to be aware of its limitations. Despite the intuitive appeal and support for a person-based model, its assumptions skew a more realistic view of human nature. Given the inherent and biased assumptions of the model or other models outside of psychology for that matter, it begs for greater depth and clarity.

In this sense, we should also be aware of other factors that may influence well-being (as well as humor and other phenomena) such as various distal and proximal social influences (e.g., culture, history, society, community, life stressors, support networks), broad trait descriptors or phenotypic influences, mood or affect, cognition, and a variety of distal and proximal biobehavioral influences (e.g., health behavior, energy). As alluded to, at the same time, we should be aware of and acknowledge the limitations associated with other disciplinary perspectives such as a purely sociological bent, despite their importance. In sum, to best understand humor, laughter, and their related, experiential counterparts, in accordance with a host of multidisciplinary constructs and discourses such as social behavior, health, and history, we need to study it within a family of scholarly and applied disciplines. A broader understanding of these determinants promises a more incisive, inclusive, and balanced view of this complex behavior, one that more accurately reflects reality and scholarly position.

In accordance with this stance and our mission, the present volume examines humor and its variants through multiple lenses. In the first paper, “The Role of Sense of Humor in an Advanced

Perspective of Organizational Management,” Salvatore Moccia examines the relationships among virtue, sense of humor and various organizational outcomes using a conceptual approach. Given Moccia’s model, there are implications for the fields of recruitment, promotion, leadership, as well as the overall organization. In the second article, “Pre-service Mathematics Teachers’ attitudes toward Integrating Humor in Math Lessons,” Avikam Gazit tests a sample of pre-service teachers to determine their attitudes regarding the integration of humor in teaching mathematics. In “Forty-five Ways to Make ‘Em Laugh,” Arthur Asa Berger insightfully discusses the many techniques of humor and how they may be used to analyze or deconstruct various jokes. Interestingly, Asa Berger further discusses how different disciplines analyze a joke. The next article, “Abandoning Our Selves to Laughter: Time and the Question of Self-Loss in Laughter” by Mark Weeks, provides us with a scholarly discussion concerning how uninhibited and spontaneous laughter *may* cause one to experience a temporary loss of self. Weeks’ discusses the self by examining the credibility of this phenomenon and how it evolves. We are also fortunate to have an article written in French by Guillaume Doizy et Jean-Luc Jarnier, “Alfred Le Petit à La Patrie: La caricature au quotidien contre le Capitain Dreyfus (1898-1901).” In this paper, the author discusses the role of caricature in the promotion of stereotype during the late 1800s. And last, we include two book reviews. In the first paper, Christie Davies reviews the text “Just Kidding, Using Humour Effectively,” by Louis R. Franzini. And secondly, Albrecht Classen provides us with a scholarly and somewhat balanced account of the Christian Kuhn and Stefan Bießenecker edited text, “Valenzen des Lachens in der Vormoderne (1250-1750).” Taken together, these articles present the readers with a range of scholarly and applied ideas from the organizational to the educational, and from the theoretical to the practical. As we noted, to best understand most humor phenomenon, a multi-determined approach is needed, a belief which guides the ISJHR.

In closing, we would like to thank the authors and the Board/reviewers for their scholarly contributions to this volume. Our gratitude is also extended to the University of Bamberg Press and Rowman and Littlefield Publishers for assisting us with the reviews of their texts. And finally, we would like to take this time to encourage our readership to submit their research to the ISJHR. We look forward to expanding our knowledge of humor and its practical applications through your valued work.

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