

Editorial

Investigating the Role of Humor in Psychological Health and Well-Being

Opening Comments

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The role of humor in psychological health and well-being is the primary focus of this special issue of *Europe's Journal of Psychology (EJOP)*. It was approximately four years ago that the first special humor issue was published in *EJOP*, highlighting humor research in both the personality and social psychology domains (Kuiper, 2010). Since that time, considerable additional research has been conducted on many different aspects of the construct of humor. One of these lines of research has considered how humor may play a role in psychological well-being and health. This line of work is reflected in the current special issue, which includes eleven original research studies on this topic, as well as an interview with a humor investigator who has conducted a number of studies on humor, health and psychological well-being. In addition, this special issue also provides a review of a recent book describing a theory of humor, coupled with comments on how this theory might then be applied to further investigations of humor, well-being and health.

Table 1 provides a brief summary of several key characteristics for each of the eleven research articles in this special humor issue. These include the nature of the humor construct that is being investigated, the sample employed, and the main issues under consideration. As shown in this table, these eleven studies encompass several different approaches to defining humor. Several of these studies have conceptualized humor as an individual difference construct, with four different humor styles being evident. These include not only the more adaptive styles of humor, such as affiliative and self-enhancing humor; but also the more maladaptive styles, such as self-defeating and aggressive humor. In addition, humor has been described in some of the present research studies by using a positive psychology approach that views humor as a character strength. Further theoretical perspectives on the construct of humor are offered by additional studies in this special issue that emphasize humor as a coping technique for dealing with stressful events; or consider the interpersonal and relational aspects of humor, be they positive, negative, or instrumental.

Table 1

Overview of Research Studies in the Special Humor Issue of EJOP (August 2014)

Investigators	Humor	Sample	Main Issues Examined
Sirigatti, Penzo, Giannetti, & Stefanile	Affiliative Humor Self-Enhancing Humor Aggressive Humor Self-Defeating Humor	High School and University Students in Italy	Relationships between humor styles, Ryff positive psychology dimensions and psychological well-being. Initial use of Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) in an Italian context.
Samson, Glassco, Lee, & Gross	Humorous Coping	University Students in the United States	Humorous coping vs. serious cognitive reappraisals in the regulation of positive and negative emotions.
Geisler & de Assunção	Humorous Coping & An Incongruity Theory of Humor	University Students and a Community Sample in Germany	Relationships between humorous coping, self-worth contingencies, and set-backs in various personal domains.
Cann & Collette	Self-Enhancing Humor	University Students in the United States	Relationships between a good sense of humor, the maintenance of stable positive affect, and psychological well-being.
Plenty, Bejerot, & Eriksson	Self-Defeating Humor	Swedish Health Care Workers in Sweden	Relationships between self-defeating humor, social competencies, motor skills, and bullying in childhood. Initial use of HSQ in Swedish context.
Kuiper, Klein, Vertes, & Maiolino	Affiliative Humor Self-Defeating Humor	University Students in Canada	Relationships between humor styles, intolerance of uncertainty and excessive worry in predicting generalized anxiety.
Maiolino & Kuiper	Affiliative Humor Self-Enhancing Humor Aggressive Humor Self-Defeating Humor	University Students in Canada	Relationships between humor styles and positive psychology constructs of gratitude and savoring in predicting positive and negative indices of psychological well-being.
Tucker, Wingate, Slis, O'Keefe, Cole, & Hollingsworth	Self-Defeating Humor	University Students in the United States	Relationships between self-defeating humor, rumination, reflections, brooding and suicidal ideation.
Edwards & Martin	Affiliative Humor Self-Enhancing Humor Aggressive Humor Self-Defeating Humor Values in Action Humor Scale	University Students in Canada	Comparing humor styles with a positive psychology humor scale in terms of predicting various positive psychology outcomes.
Campbell & Moroz	Relational Humor Use (Positive, Negative, & Instrumental)	Heterosexual Married Couples in Canada	Relational humor use and its impact on varying degrees of success in the resolution of conflicts in couples.
Ford, McCreight, & Richardson	Affiliative Humor Self-Enhancing Humor Aggressive Humor Self-Defeating Humor	Community Sample in the United States	Relationships between humor, approach and avoidance motives, and happiness.

These various ways of conceptualizing or defining humor are then explored in this special humor issue of EJOP by examining a number of different issues that pertain to humor's role in psychological well-being and health. As

shown in Table 1, there are a wide variety of humor-related topics that are considered. These include a number of theoretical-empirical investigations of various links and relationships between humor research and positive psychology approaches to well-being, as well as work examining the role of humorous versus serious cognitive reappraisals in dealing effectively with stressful events. Further topics examined in this special issue include the relationships between humor and bullying in childhood, humor and conflict resolution in couples, humor and the stability of positive affect, humor and generalized anxiety, humor's role in rumination and suicidal ideation, the relationship between humor, coping and self-worth contingencies, and humor's links with dispositional motives to approach and avoid.

Taken together, this collection of studies provides an intriguing view of contemporary research on the role of humor in psychological well-being and health. Furthermore, this collection clearly elucidates several recent advancements in psychologically-based humor research that have become increasingly evident over the past few years. Until fairly recently, many of the research studies on humor's role in psychological well-being and health were primarily descriptive in nature, consisting of demonstrations that humor, either as an individual difference construct or a manipulation, could play some type of role in psychological well-being and health. Much less was said, however, about exactly *how* humor might operate to either enhance or detract from psychological well-being and health. In other words, relatively little is yet known about the proposed theoretical mechanisms and processes that may account for humor's impact on well-being and health, be it positive or negative.

In contrast, the present set of studies moves to the next level of scientific explanation by more clearly detailing the various theoretical processes and mechanisms that may link various facets of the construct of humor to psychological health and well-being. In doing so, many of the studies in this special issue integrate relevant theoretical approaches and models from a wide variety of domains in psychology into the study of humor, well-being and health. These approaches and models cover such topics as positive psychology character strengths, gratitude and savoring, emotional regulation, resilience, social competencies and motor skills, intolerance of uncertainty and generalized anxiety, goal activation and shielding, self-worth contingencies, broaden and build approaches, a response style theory of rumination, interpersonal theories of suicide, and dispositional approach and avoidance motives.

Moreover, these advances in theoretical model-building have also been coupled with the use of more sophisticated data analytic techniques. In turn, these techniques provide for the more precise articulation and tests of possible causal pathways and underlying theoretical processes in humor research on psychological well-being and health. As represented in several of the studies in this special issue, these techniques include the use of multiple mediator models, structural equation modelling, and an actor-partner interdependence model to help explain humor's potential role in health and well-being.

In reading through the present set of articles, it should be kept in mind that the intent of this special issue was not to provide the reader with an exhaustive overview of all of the current research that investigates the role of humor in psychological health and well-being. Rather, the intent was to provide the reader with a snapshot of several different contemporary approaches that investigate the role of humor in this domain. As such, the topics covered in this special issue represent only a small portion of the increasing number of studies that now explore the role of humor in psychological well-being and health. It is hoped, however, that even this limited set of articles will provide the reader with an intriguing and fascinating journey through contemporary theoretical and empirical approaches to the investigation of humor, psychological health and well-being.

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About the Author

Dr. **Nicholas A. Kuiper** has been a professor of clinical psychology at the University of Western Ontario since 1978. During this time he has published numerous articles and chapters on humor, psychological well-being, depression, anxiety, self-schema processing of personal information, and other topics of interest.