



**POSITIVE  
PSYCHOLOGY  
IN PRACTICE**

# The Positive Psychology of Laughter and Humour

**AUTHORS**

Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky,  
Merv Neal and Jerome Carson

# THE POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY OF LAUGHTER AND HUMOUR

# Praise for *The Positive Psychology of Laughter and Humour*

‘The amount of attention to detail given in this book is no joke. It takes you on a journey starting from the history of laughter and humour, all the way to the latest research and application of laughter in a diverse range of contexts. Whether you’re interested in laughter as a general topic or looking to incorporate laughter into your therapeutic toolbox, this book presents you with case studies, the science and future direction of laughter and humour. Essential reading for researchers, practitioners, and anyone with an interest in laughter.’

**Dr Gulcan Garip**, University of Derby, UK

‘I thoroughly recommend this book to those seeking a comprehensive yet accessible introduction to a recent fascinating confluence of laughter, humour, and positive psychology for practical benefits. It is a cutting-edge work presenting diverse academic, practitioner, and personal perspectives. Together, these offer important insights into the current situation, how that evolved historically, and where it might be heading.’

**Mark C. Weeks**, Nagoya University, Japan

‘As an educator who has been teaching humour studies for over 25 years, I am extremely enthusiastic about endorsing this exceptional publication. It is one of the most comprehensive and informative books that I have reviewed on the psychology of laughter and humour. I have no doubt that this book will quickly advance to the forefront in the psychology community as the “bible” for laughter and humour studies.’

**Mary Kay Morrison**, Founding Director, Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor (AATH) Humor Academy

‘A bedside companion for anyone interested in laughter and humour. I am truly impressed by all the chapters and have also learned so much. The depth of research and engaging writing style make the book a compelling read that I believe will resonate with a wide audience.’

**Nilgun Kuru Alici**, Associate Professor, Hacettepe University, Turkey

‘Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky and co-authors offer a significant contribution to laughter as therapy in this meticulously researched exploration of humour, laughter, and positive psychology. Gonot-Schoupinsky’s development of The Laughie and The Laugh-Thrive model offers a unique method of prescribing and self-prescribing laughter, encouraging readers to embrace this source

of joy and wellbeing and not leave it to chance. Grounded in a positive psychology framework, the book becomes even more robust. The inclusion of positive autoethnography provides insightful narratives into the benefits and application of laughter and humour in diverse settings.'

**Ros Ben-Moshe MPH**, Adjunct Lecturer, School of Public Health and Psychology, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia, and Author of *The Laughter Effect: How to Build Joy, Resilience and Positivity in Your Life* and *Laughing at Cancer: How to Heal with Love, Laughter and Mindfulness*

'This book takes us on a laughter journey with 3 global experts. I wholeheartedly encourage people to read this practical journey to find and experience the joys of Laughter Therapy or Laughter Yoga. Author Merv Neal, was and still is, an inspiration to me and others with chronic disease to help our life journeys be full of laughter. This book is practical, real and the first of its kind. I will continue to use the book and the advice from these experts to help improve the lives of others with chronic disease.'

**Professor Paul Bennett RN PhD FISN**, Griffith University, Australia

'A very interesting and important contribution to humour studies, written in an accessible style, with many useful charts and diagrams relating to humour and laughter and a distinctive focus on positive psychology.'

**Professor Emeritus Arthur Asa Berger**, San Francisco State University, USA

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# THE POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY OF LAUGHTER AND HUMOUR

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

We dedicate this book to the science and practice of laughter and humour.  
And to the art of positive laughter and positive humour.

H A H A  
A H O H  
H O H A  
A H A H

Laughter as art in the HaHa Square (Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky).

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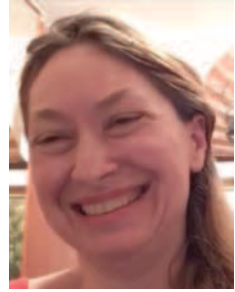
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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky** completed her PhD in Psychology at the University of Bolton in 2023 following an MSc (Health Psychology) and an MBA in 1989. This book is inspired by her PhD thesis on laughter prescription, and research in laughter, humour, positive psychology and methodology. Her contributions include the Laughie (Laugh Intentionally Everyday) laughter prescription, Personal Development Theory of laughter and humour, HuLA (humour laughter affect) model, pragmatic autoethnography and positive autoethnography, and concept terms of positive reflexivity and solirisy. An independent consultant, Freda lives in Monaco with her husband Xavier.



**Merv Neal** is ‘Australia’s Leading Laughter Expert’, and the CEO of Laughter Yoga Australia. He has appeared on Channel 9 TV *60 Minutes*, Channel 10 TV *The Project*, SBS TV on *Medicine or Myth*, ABC TV show *Catalyst*, and Channel 7 TV *Well Traveler and The House of Wellness* to name a few. He is a professional speaker and facilitator, researcher, Laughter Yoga Master Trainer, and Laughie Practitioner. He is presently working with a variety of health and business organisations throughout Australia, and now Bolton University, UK. He launched the Laughie Challenge Australia in 2022 and runs the annual Laughter Wellbeing Conference.



**Jerome Carson** is Professor of Psychology at the University of Bolton. In 2012, Jerome established an MSc in Positive Psychology at the University of Bolton with Dr Chathurika Kannangara. Jerome is interested in the field of alcohol addiction and recovery from a



lived experience perspective, though interestingly much of his research has been in the field of mental health recovery. Jerome also researches the area of positive psychology and autoethnography. Jerome is a qualified clinical psychologist and is Editor in Chief of the Emerald Journal *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*. He has published over 200 papers.

## FOREWORD

This book is a very interesting and important contribution to humour studies, written in an accessible style, with many useful charts and diagrams relating to humour and laughter and a distinctive focus on positive psychology.

Humour is a supremely enigmatic topic that many of our greatest minds have grappled with – from Aristotle and Thomas Hobbes to Immanuel Kant and Sigmund Freud, not to mention many present-day linguistic scholars, sociologists, psychologists, and psychoanalysts.

Google (accessed 12 April 2023) offers the following information about various aspects of humour:

TOPIC	RESULTS
Humour	1,390,000,000
Humour and Health	197,000,000
Laughter	1,600,000,000
Health Benefits of Humour	39,200,000
Health Benefits of Laughter	98,000,000

These figures suggest an enormous interest by the general public in humour, laughter and their relationship to health and wellbeing. Amazon.com's internet bookstore offers some interesting information about books on humour and laughter:

TOPIC	RESULTS
Books on Humour	70,000 Books
Books on Laughter	30,000 Books
Books on Humour and Health	50,000 Books
Books on Humour and Laughter	10,000 Books

What the Amazon books show is that there are an incredible number of books on humour, laughter, as well as humour and health and humour and

laughter. These subjects are of interest to people because they have learned, from reading articles in newspapers and magazines, about the many benefits of humour and its relationship to laughter and our physical and mental wellbeing.

This book, *The Positive Psychology of Humour and Laughter*, by Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky, Merv Neal, and Jerome Carson, is an important contribution to the study of humour and is distinctive in its discussion of humour and positive psychology. As the authors explain:

*Laughter has an uneasy relationship with positive psychology, despite being key to communicating joy and happiness. The Positive Psychology of Laughter and Humour aims to correct this disconnect by combining academic insight with real-world experience. Drawing on the authors' diverse backgrounds and expertise, this is the first academic volume dedicated to the rarely discussed topic of laughter and humour in positive psychology. Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky, Merv Neal, and Jerome Carson demonstrate how laughter and humour differ, and how both can be applied within positive psychology to boost mood and maintain positive outcomes. The Positive Psychology of Laughter and Humour includes case studies and real-world insight as well as providing a methodological and theoretical background to the topic, giving rigorous theoretical and methodological insight for researchers, and including pedagogical sections in each chapter useful for teachers and researchers.*

One of the benefits of this book is that its authors have varied backgrounds which contribute to the richness of the book, for it relies on personal experiences as well as scholarly perspectives. The authors are: Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky, a scholar and independent consultant, who completed her PhD in Psychology at the University of Bolton in 2023. Her research interests include laughter and humour for health and well-being, particularly the potential of prescribing laughter, and methodology. Merv Neal is 'Australia's Leading Laughter Expert', and the CEO of Laughter Yoga, Australia. He has appeared on *60 Minutes*, *Today Tonight*, SBS TV on *Medicine or Myth*, and ABC TV show *Catalyst*. He is a professional speaker and facilitator, citizen scientist, Laughter Yoga, and Laughie practitioner. Jerome Carson is Professor of Psychology at the University of Bolton. Carson is interested in the field of alcohol addiction and recovery from a lived experience perspective.

The book is distinctive in that, as its title suggests, it focuses on positive psychology and its role in the study of humour and laughter. It includes chapters on topics such as a historical overview of laughter and humour, humour and positive psychology, and laughter and humour disentangled. As the authors write:

*There is undoubtedly an argument for claiming that the definition of humour as a character strength is currently adequate, as laughter is highlighted within it. Nevertheless, unless we can clearly disentangle laughter and humour, the investigation and harnessing of their joint and, or separate benefits and uses is problematic. As we will see in the following chapters, humour-free therapeutic laughter modalities, and laughter research where humour is not involved, or is secondary, are gaining in importance. So too is research that prioritises the role of laughter, for example investigations into the use of laughter as an audio diagnostic tool for treating depression and Parkinson's disease. A clear separation of laughter and humour is therefore necessary.*

The book also features chapters by Merv Neal with insights from a laughter practitioner and what we might describe as applied positive psychology and humour. It concludes with a chapter on the future of humour and laughter and positive psychology.

Although the book is scholarly, it is written in an accessible style, and has many interesting charts and diagrams on various aspects of humour and laughter, and thus will be of interest not only to psychologists and other kinds of scholars interested in humour and laughter, but also to the general public. As such, it is a significant achievement and a valuable addition to the thousands of books on humour, laughter, and health. It is a pleasure to end this introduction to this extremely valuable book on humour and positive psychology on a positive note: 'Try it, you'll like it.' And it will be not only be of interest but also be useful for its readers.

Arthur Asa Berger\*  
Professor Emeritus

\***Arthur Asa Berger** is Professor Emeritus of Broadcast and Electronic Communication Arts at San Francisco State University. He has published 90 books on semiotics, media criticism, popular culture, humour, and tourism. He has authored seven books on humor and many articles on various aspects of the subject, including *Humor, Psyche and Society* (Vernon) and *Shakespeare's 'The Comedy of Errors'* (Anthem).

# PREFACE

We welcome you on this voyage in *Positive Psychology, Laughter, and Humour*. The purpose of our book is, broadly, two-fold: firstly to convey our views of laughter and humour as vital positive psychology resources, and secondly to stimulate more enthusiasm in them by contemplating academic research, theory, case studies, and practitioner insight.

My interest in these fields was ignited during my MSc health psychology studies, when I sought a positive, universal, rapid, effective, safe, legal, and free way to boost positive mood. The Laughie one-minute laughter prescription builds on my conviction that the intentional use of laughter and humour, innate resources we all share, is a positive psychology powerhouse. When Australian laughter professional Merv Neal independently launched his Laughie Challenge in 2022, a fruitful collaboration, powered by the authentic zest of Professor Jerome Carson, the positive psychology expert of our team, began.

Our book leans on my PhD thesis, supervised by Carson, and on Neal's laughter practitioner expertise. Let us look briefly at its contents. In Chapter 1, I distil some of the rich history of laughter and humour. In Chapter 2, Carson immerses us in the world of positive psychology with his engaging and pleasantly didactic style. In Chapter 3, I consider laughter and humour within positive psychology. In Chapter 4, I present academic laughter and humour research, and in Chapter 5, I deliberate on their real-world applications. In Chapter 6, Neal draws us into the dynamic world of laughter therapy. In Chapter 7, I showcase six laughter and humour expert case studies. In Chapter 8, Neal recounts how his experiences of COVID-19 led to the Laughie Challenge. In Chapter 9, Neal dons a citizen scientist hat to share his laughter research findings. Finally, in Chapter 10, I contemplate a few of the promising avenues open to us in these exciting and rapidly developing fields.

Acknowledgements are due to Emeritus Professor Arthur Asa Berger for his Foreword, Dr Mark C. Weeks for his helpful suggestions and editing, and Dr Gulcan Garip, Dr Nilgun Kuru Alici, Ros Ben-Moshe, and Mary Kay Morrison for their recommendations.

We hope you enjoy this book and look forward to hearing about your experiences with it, and your ideas as to how we can improve potential future editions.

Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky, PhD