

Book review

Vanderheiden, Elisabeth & Mayer, Claude-Hélène (2021). *The Palgrave Handbook of Humour Research*. New York City: Springer Nature.

This handbook is intended to be a primary reference book on humour from social, cultural and psychological perspectives and particularly emphasises transdisciplinary and multicultural views. In this book, the reader will find conceptual theoretical and empirical chapters on humour in contemporary, Covid-19-related, and future-oriented research. This volume adds to the literature on humour from different disciplinary perspectives, contributes specialised views from psychological, cultural, social and pedagogical perspectives, and takes various theoretical and methodological standpoints into account whilst also drawing from a variety of focal points. The book is divided into six parts and contains 25 chapters in all. Each contribution is valuable and adds to the volume's diversity, thereby providing an interesting read.

Part 1: Humour in Cultural Contexts

Chapter 2: “Predicting Self-Esteem Using Humour Styles: A Cross-Cultural Study” is authored by Julie Aitken Schermer, Eva Boyanova Papazova, Maria Magdalena Kwiatkowska, Radosław Rogoza, Joonha Park, Christopher Marcin Kowalski, Marija Branković, Marta Doroszuk, Truong Thi Khanh Ha, Dzintra Iliško, Sadia Malik, Samuel Lins, Ginés Navarro-Carrillo, Oscar Oviedo-Trespalacios, Jorge Torres-Marín, Anna Włodarczyk, Sibebe Dias de Aquino, Tatiana Volkodav and Georg Krammer. This chapter reports the results of a study that assessed the differences in humour styles across 15 countries as well as the relationships amongst the four humour styles assessed by the Humor Styles Questionnaire (Martin et al., 2003) and individual self-esteem in each country. The main purpose was to go beyond previous studies that were largely limited to homogeneous cultural and social contexts without significant geographical variability. Similar to the results of previous research, this study suggested a connection between self-esteem and humour styles. The authors discuss the results both within the individual countries and across samples considered in the study.

Chapter 3: “The Use of Humour to Deal with Uncomfortable Moments in Interaction: A Cross-Cultural Approach” by Kerry Mullan and Christine Béal presents the development of their own model, which was designed to account for the different facets of humour in conversation. The authors demonstrate their model using samples of conversations about humour in interactions in both the French and English languages, combining several approaches including pragmatics, discourse analysis and conversation analysis. The main strength of this research is that it was conducted in different cross-cultural contexts. The findings reveal that humour is frequently used to deal with embarrassing or awkward moments in similar ways by both Australian and French speakers.

Chapter 4: “Humour as a Strategy to Talk about and Challenge Dominant Discourses of Social Integration: A Case Study of Adolescent German Turkish Descendants in Germany”, authored by Yesim Kakalic and Stephanie Schnurr, explores how German Turks use humour to respond to mainstream discourses of social integration in Germany. Rooted in a positive

psychology background, the authors show how humour is utilised as a coping mechanism in the context of social integration in Germany. The findings reveal that using humour to respond to negative portrayals in the media enables German Turks to feel in control, effectively cope with stress, gain distance from the factors causing them stress, and build feelings of self-mastery in times of adversity.

Chapter 5: “The Position of Humour in Social Crises: When and What Does Turkish Society Laugh at?” by Ayşe Asli Sezgin and Tuğba Yolcu examines the principles of positive psychology in terms of life satisfaction within societies (Peterson, & Seligman, 2004), particularly with reference to the Turkish society. Conducted using a descriptive analysis method, the study discusses the role of Twitter-generated humour content on incidents that were considered social crises in Turkey during the years 2010-2020. The findings reveal that humour expressed through social media generally reflected social harmony through the use of humorous language in the face of social changes.

Chapter 6: “Humour as Cultural Capital in Transitions” by Mariana Lazzaro-Salazar explores the use of humour in intercultural communications by migrant doctors in Chile. The main aim of the chapter is to analyse how migrant doctors perceived humour differently as they transitioned from one culture to another, as well as the socio-pragmatic functions of humour as these doctors reflected on their experiences of cultural transition. The findings reflect the use of humour as a way of making sense of the migration process and of managing sensitive topics during the interview.

Chapter 7: “Nigerian Cultural Concept of Humour and Its Use as a Coping Strategy” by Felix-Kingsley Obialo is aimed at answering the questions ‘what are the cultural conceptions of humour in the Nigerian sociocultural milieu’ and ‘how do Nigerians use humour as a coping mechanism?’ The research was conducted with three different tribes in Nigeria, and the chapter presents the results in terms of similarities and differences amongst the tribes. Moreover, the author discusses the commonalities and peculiarities of other cultures’ conceptions of humour as a means of providing emotional relief within diverse settings.

Chapter 8: “Interrogating the Phenomenon of Suffering and Smiling by Nigerians: A Mixed Method Study” by Onwu Inya and Blessing Inya is another study conducted on a Nigerian sample. The main aim of this research is to understand whether the study subjects were comfortable with the phenomenon of laughing at their troubles whilst, at the same time, enduring the burden of the difficulties. In other words, the authors sought to determine if the study subjects were comfortable suffering whilst smiling. The results show that the Nigerian participants displayed a complex emotional and cognitive response to unfavourable situations. This disposition appeared to have some association with their religious affiliations and educational attainment and positioned them as a resilient people.

Part 2: Humour in History and Politics

Chapter 9: “Humour as a Defence Mechanism: Dismantling Holocaust and Icons in Israeli Culture” is written by Liat Steir-Livny. This chapter sheds light on the ways in which Israeli Jews have employed humour to deconstruct Holocaust symbols and icons over the last 30 years. The chapter focuses on the humorous representation of three icons: the concentration camps, Hitler, and Anne Frank. The findings reveal that Holocaust humour is a defence mechanism often used by many Israeli Jews to mitigate lingering fear and disempower the horror of the memory of the Holocaust.

Chapter 10: “Geopolitics of Humour and Development in Nepal and Afghanistan” by Rupak Shrestha and Jennifer Fluri illustrates humour in everyday life through the authors’ research in Afghanistan and Nepal, which aimed to examine common and disparate uses of

humour during times of precarity, violence, and displacement. The chapter shows how humour operates alongside adversity as a mechanism for ‘making-do’ (Attardo, 2020) and creating spaces of connection and interaction that challenge circumstances of oppression, precarity, and uncertainty.

Chapter 11: “Humour and Politics: A Discursive Approach to Humour” by Maria Aldina Marques looks at the relationship between humour and politics in contemporary Portuguese society. It is based on the linguistic features of humour in journalistic columns authored by Ricardo Araújo Pereira, a famous Portuguese humourist. The aim of the study is to show the potential of a discursive-enunciative category in analysing nonsense humour.

Chapter 12: “White Laughter, Black Pain? On the Comic and Parodic Enactment of Racial-Colonial Stereotypes” by Matthias Pauwels is a chapter that focuses on humour and racial stereotypes in order to critique and defuse such stereotypes. The author relies on a trans-disciplinary approach in which both psychoanalytical concepts and aesthetic theory are used to advance a number of interrelated theoretical arguments and address related problems and objections.

Part 3: Humour in the Workplace

Chapter 13: “Risky Business: Humour, Hierarchy, and Harmony in New Zealand and South Korean Workplaces” is a chapter authored by Barbara Plester and Heesun Kim aimed at investigating the role of humour in New Zealand and South Korean business organisations. The main hypothesis is that workplace humour has different interpretations and outcomes in New Zealand and South Korean contexts. The findings reveal that the way in which humour is expressed can achieve employee harmony in different ways in the two contexts.

Chapter 14: “Resilience as Moderator between Workplace Humour and Well-being, a Positive Psychology Perspective” by Rudolf M. Oosthuizen reviewed 31 relevant studies that presented the moderating role of resilience in adaptive humour styles and well-being at work from a positive psychology perspective. The findings reveal that using humour in a positive way can both increase cooperation amongst co-workers and help employees get accustomed to an organisational culture.

Chapter 15: “Humour as a Coping Strategy for Employees in Remote Workspaces during Covid-19” is a chapter authored by Claude-Hélène Mayer and Lolo Jacques Mayer related to the way people used humour as a coping strategy during the outbreak of Covid-19, with a particular focus on the workplace setting. The study was conducted on the content of WhatsApp messages sent amongst a group of colleagues working for a consulting organisation in South Africa. The findings reveal that, most of the time, the WhatsApp communications were used to share humorous comments, whilst very few of the messages related directly to work.

Part 4: Humour over the Lifespan

Chapter 16: “Humour as a Resource for Children” by Doris Bergen focuses on the role that humour can have in the first years of life. After a brief introduction to how children’s humour develops during the first years, the author focuses on research related to how humour can be a resource to help children understand and deal with the social and emotional aspects of life. This analysis shows that the literature on children’s humour development and the way children use humour as a coping strategy is minimal. Therefore, it suggests that future research on this topic is necessary.

Chapter 17: “Humour in Romantic Relationships” by Maria Nicoleta Turliuc, Octav Sorin Candel and Lorena Antonovici is a theoretical contribution that explores the role of humour as

an important personal skill to strengthen the cohesion of couples and help them thrive. The authors present updated literature in this field by discussing the functions of humour in romantic relationships across cultures. The main findings suggest that humour is a crucial mechanism in romantic relationships and that having a sense of humour is found to be attractive for both women and men. Specific differences related to sociocultural contexts are presented and discussed.

Chapter 18: “Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Humour Appreciation and Function across the Lifespan” by Jennifer Tehan Stanley and Jennifer R. Turner focuses on reviewing the literature about the connections between culture and age differences as they relate to humour from a developmental lifespan perspective. Their review shows that humour preference differs both by age group and cultural background.

Chapter 19: “‘West of Hollywood’: Humour as Reparation in the Life and Work of Walter Becker” by James L. Kelley seeks to understand how humour functioned in the life and work of Walter Carl Becker, an American musician, songwriter, and record producer. It takes as its theoretical background both Hans Eysenck’s tripartite theory of humour and Positive Psychology 2.0 (Eysenck 1942; Wong 2011). The findings reveal that Becker was able to mitigate the self-other corrosion that emanated from his hipster-satirist persona by integrating into his art.

Part 5: Humour in a Pedagogical Context

Chapter 20: “Humour in Adult Education” by Elisabeth Vanderheiden is based on empirical research in which the author investigated the role of humour in adult education, what functions humour can fulfil, and what changes occur over time, taking into account age, gender and cultural differences. Such research in this field is needed, as it has received little attention thus far. The results show that humour is perceived by trainers and teachers as a very relevant topic in adult education that positively affects the learning environment and outcomes. In particular, the chapter ably exposes that age, gender and cultural differences are variables that can influence the perception of humour.

Chapter 21: “Humour in Mathematics Teaching: A Study in Portugal and Spain” by Luís Menezes, Pablo Flores, Floriano Viseu, Susana Amante and Ana Maria Costa is based on a research study that focused on the use of humour in the school context, with particular reference to the teaching of mathematics. Starting from the assumption that positive humour can positively influence learning, the authors investigate possible differences between Portuguese and Spanish teachers of mathematics in terms of their perceptions of having a sense of humour and in their use of humour during mathematics lessons. The results show that the majority of teachers used humour and that they clearly recognised the educational value of humour in teaching mathematics.

6. Humour in the Contexts of Medicine, Therapy and Counselling

Chapter 22: “The Positive Effect of Humour and Amateur Dubbing on Hospitalised Adolescents” by Margherita Dore, Laura Vagnoli, Francesca Addarii, Elena Amore and Rosanna Martin focuses on the hospitalisation of children and adolescents, especially those with chronic diseases, and how humour can be helpful in coping with bad moods, pain and boredom. The authors conducted empirical research to investigate how amateur dubbing and humorous audio-visual content can foster well-being amongst hospitalised children and teenagers. The findings reveal that amateur dubbing can be a useful non-pharmacological technique to improve patient well-being during hospital stays.

Chapter 23: “The Covid-19 Pandemic as an Opportunity for Positive Psychology to Promote a Wider-Ranging Definition of Humour and Laughter” by Fredda Gonot-Schoupinsky and Gulcan Garip debates the potential benefits of strength combinations research. The authors discuss the role and potential of humour according to a more fluid approach to humour in the third wave of positive psychology and consider humour a strength that is interlinked with all six core virtues (wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence).

Chapter 24: “On the Relationships between Humour, Stress and Flow Experience: Introducing the Humour-Flow Model” by Marek Bartzik and Corinna Peifer is a conceptual paper aimed at evaluating the potential mechanism of interplay between humour and stress that introduces a new testable model called the Humour-Flow Model. The findings reveal that this model entails testable predictions about interplay among humour, stress, and the Humor-Flow Model. Specifically, positive effects were found on individual and organisational outcomes, identifying this new model as a promising future workplace intervention.

Chapter 25: “Working with Humour in Psychotherapy” by Aakriti Malik highlights the different theoretical and practical perspectives on the use of humour in psychotherapy. After a brief introduction to the historical and etymological background of humour, an explanation of the theories of humour is presented. Next, a paragraph is dedicated to the pros and cons of using humour in psychotherapy, according to the most recent studies published. Then, after a presentation of how humour is utilised by patients presenting with several pathologies, the authors report case vignettes that show how humour can be used in therapy.

In general, all chapters are well written and provide knowledge regarding the theoretical background of humour studies. This book offers high content quality with great expository clarity that contributes to an easy, straightforward and instructive reading. It is scholarly, with adequate references, but it is written in an accessible style. In my opinion, it represents an interesting reading for all scholars and laypeople interested in the field of humour (as outlined e.g. by Attardo 2020, Dynel 2013, and Ruch 2008). Psychologists, linguists, philologists, media studies researchers and the general public may all find useful notions and perspectives relevant to their work or personal interests.

Alberto Dionigi

Studio Psi.Co., Cattolica, Italy

albe.dionigi@gmail.com

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