

# Humor, laughter and mental health: a case study of Mary Kay Morrison

Mary Kay Morrison, Ros Ben-Moshe and Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky

## Abstract

**Purpose** – *The purpose of this paper is to meet Mary Kay Morrison, an active member and past president of the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor (AATH).*

**Design/methodology/approach** – *This case study is presented in two sections: an autobiography of Mary Kay Morrison, followed by a ten-question interview.*

**Findings** – *Mary Kay recommends exploration of the benefits of humor and laughter for mental health professionals. In recognition of the need for clarifying terminology, she coined the terms Humergy, which is joyful, optimistic, healthy energy and Humordoomer, which denotes a person who zaps that energy from us. Her work includes exploring the five stages of Humor Development as a significant factor in understanding cognitive development.*

**Research limitations/implications** – *This is a personal narrative, albeit from an educator who has been active in the field of applied and therapeutic humor for over 30 years.*

**Practical implications** – *Humor and laughter research is recommended to explore their use in optimizing mental health. Mary Kay endorses expanding pioneering work in therapeutic humor as a treatment for anxiety and depression. She shares recommendations for humor practice in both prevention of mental health challenges and as a viable treatment for anxiety and depression.*

**Social implications** – *Three humor benefits with particular social applications are highlighted. Humor facilitates communication, creates an optimal learning environment and supports change.*

**Originality/value** – *To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first case study about Mary Kay Morrison, Past President of the AATH and founder of the AATH Certified Humor Professional program.*

**Keywords** *Humor, Laughter, Mental health*

**Paper type** *Case study*

Mary Kay Morrison is based at the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor, AATH, Rockford, Illinois, USA.

Ros Ben-Moshe is based at the School of Public Health and Psychology, La Trobe University – Bundoora Campus, Melbourne, Australia.

Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky is based at the Department of Psychology, University of Bolton, Bolton, UK.

## 1. Introduction

This case study adds to our series on laughter, humor and mental health. In previous sessions, we met Merv Neal ([Neal and Gonot-Schoupinsky, 2022](#)), CEO of Laughter Yoga Australia and initiator of the Laughie Challenge, Arthur Asa Berger ([Berger and Gonot-Schoupinsky, 2023](#)), an Emeritus Professor of San Francisco State University who has written extensively on humor, and Ros Ben-Moshe ([Ben-Moshe and Gonot-Schoupinsky, 2023](#)), a positive psychologist at La Trobe University who has actively used laughter to traverse a bowel cancer diagnosis to optimize healing and well-being. We recently also met with Madan Kataria ([Kataria et al., 2023](#)), the founder of Laughter Yoga. These case studies make a case for the need to consider the use of laughter and humor as a viable response to the growing mental health crisis. The highly accessible, low-risk and enjoyable potential of laughter, be it with or without humor, renders it a practical intervention for personal development ([Gonot-Schoupinsky et al., 2020](#)) and an effective one to support mental health and well-being ([Stivi and Rosendahl, 2022](#)).

Here, Ros and I are delighted to invite Mary Kay Morrison, a past president of the Association of Applied and Therapeutic Humor (AATH) from Rockford, Illinois, to recount

her story. The AATH is a non-profit, international organization established in 1987. Its stated mission is to “elevate and nourish the human spirit through the intentional use of humor and laughter” (AATH, 2023). The AATH Humor Academy was founded by Morrison in 2009 to facilitate the study, practice and promotion of healthy humor and to recognize the significance of humor studies. The completion of this three-year program is distinguished with board-certified recognition of graduates as Certified Humor Professionals (CHPs). Current president, Roberta Gold (CHP) has served from its inception as an advisor/mentor for the Humor Academy. Ros and Mary Kay met at an AATH conference and have cherished their laughter-filled networking opportunities while individually writing and publishing humor research. But let us hear more about this unique journey in humor studies from Mary Kay herself!

## **2. Mary Kay Morrison shares her story**

### ***2.1 My childhood and early education***

My father, Bill Wiltz, did not actually tell jokes; he just visibly enjoyed life. After serving in the Second World War, he returned to his job as a mail carrier. While he rarely talked about his war experiences, he often exuberantly sang the songs he learned in the military. His favorite nonsensical statements followed by his hearty laughter delighted family and friends. Many of those witticisms involved gentle teasing of my mother, Ruth, who admirably tolerated his quips. As the love of his life, he relished eliciting her laughter.

The oldest of seven children, I quickly learned to make silly faces as a distraction when diapering a baby and entertaining my brothers on long car trips. My mother organized our busy and lively household. She creatively led my Girl Scout troupe and arranged piano lessons. When my youngest brother went to school, she became a hospital technician. A product of the Great Depression, she was generally serious and structured. Both parents valued education and family time. We attended Catholic grade and high school. We played many family games including the favorite pinochle and relished travel via camping. The blend of an optimistic, playful father and a thoughtful, organized mother became a powerful force in my life journey.

When I told my parents I wanted to go to college, they were supportive, but their tight budget did not include money for college expenses. A scholarship cemented my choice to attend Cardinal Stritch College in Milwaukee. I worked as a nanny to pay for room and board. After two years, I changed my major from nutrition to child development transferring to Northern Illinois University (NIU), where I was the first in our family to receive a college degree.

### ***2.2 Working in education and the significance of play***

Armed with a degree in Early Childhood Education, I embraced my first job as a kindergarten teacher in a high poverty school. With my child development background, I eagerly integrated the concepts of *learning through play* into my curriculum. However, within a few weeks, administrators advised me that teachers were expected to spend a considerable amount of class time preparing for state and federal tests. Cognitive research was relatively new at that time, and the school curriculum was based on long-established traditional programs. These experiences motivated me to dig deeper into brain research and initiated my life-long journey of exploring the relationship between play and brain development.

During those first years of teaching, I married, had four children and taught several different grade levels. When my husband changed careers, we moved to join his family farming business. The next years were filled with numerous jobs while trying to keep up with laundry, cooking, the farm work and four active kids. I treasured activities that included

being a 4-H (head-heart-hands-health) leader, serving on several community boards and being active in our kids' schools. I joke that my resume looks like I am 100 years old, as I held numerous educational positions including substitute teaching and teaching Early Childhood classes at NIU. I was hired as part of the staff that developed an *attention deficit (hyperactive) disorder* (ADD/ADHD) clinic in the mental health department at Kishwaukee Hospital. My role at the hospital involved organizing the program for counseling ADHD/ADD children, their parents and teachers to provide mental health support and resources for their schooling.

For seven long years, I attended graduate school in the evenings and was elated to finally complete my master's degree in Adult Education at NIU. Emerging cognitive research motivated me to continue to explore the significant importance of play and humor in education as an integral force in lifelong learning. My career path included several years as a counselor at Kishwaukee Community College adult education program for those who had dropped out of traditional school settings. Many shared painful stories about their educational experiences with vivid memories of the shame and guilt about not succeeding in school. Their insights had a powerful impact on my desire to initiate positive change in educational systems.

Subsequently, I was offered an opportunity to work at an Illinois Regional Office of Education, to provide staff development for over 200 area schools. I attended several brain science and mental health conferences followed by developing workshops on the neurological benefits of play. In these interactive sessions, I encouraged teachers to share creative and playful classroom strategies. I shared these ideas in education seminars and eventually in publications.

Magic happened when I met Dr Bob Sylwester at a brain research conference. He was the author of numerous books, including *How to Explain a Brain: An Educator's Handbook of Brain Terms and Cognitive Processes* (Sylwester, 2004). I asked what he knew about the role of humor and the brain. He quipped that if someone could figure that out, then they would get a Nobel Peace Prize. He became an invaluable mentor in my focus on the role of humor in education.

My job at the regional office became a "petri dish" for growth in writing and presentations on learning. My boss, Dr Richard Fairgrievies enthusiastically supported creation of *Humor and the Brain* seminars. These were frequently requested for statewide administrative seminars.

### ***2.3 My work with the association for applied and therapeutic humor***

A conference offering a session on *humor in education* initiated my participation in AATH. I met numerous leaders in the field of humor research including Dr Steve Sultanoff, a psychologist and a pioneer in the study of therapeutic humor. I volunteered in AATH, served on the board and eventually accepted the position of AATH president.

Inspired by research on humor and laughter presented at AATH conferences I summarized ideas about the vigorous, optimistic energy force of humor as an almost elusive and undefined quality that people value. The vitality of humor energy that emerges from a hopeful, joyful spirit goes beyond the normal description of a sense of humor. It mirrors a positive state of mental health.

My first book, *Using Humor to Maximize Learning* (Morrison, 2008), integrated the innovative ideas gathered from teachers and provided an extensive synopsis of pioneering humor research. Exploration of the neuroscience of learning and the importance of humor for brain development enhanced the original concept from humorous energy to the terminology of *humergy*:

Humergy is the energy that emerges from the joy and optimism of our inner spirit, reflects our unique personality, and nourishes a healthy mind/body balance.

Findings from the cognitive research included:

- All learning goes through our emotional filter.
- Play is critical to optimal brain development.
- Kids grow best with a focus on their strengths.
- Trust is the foundation of positive relationships.
- Laughter builds trust and fosters positive communication.

The experience of serving on the AATH board provided invaluable connections with international humor professionals. When joining this board of directors, few classes or programs were available to teach the science of humor studies. With the assistance of many leaders in the AATH organization including Karyn Buxman, president of AATH at that time, the original course description for the AATH Humor Academy was drafted. My book, *Using Humor to Maximize Learning*, was the text.

This second book, *Using Humor to Maximize Living* (Morrison, 2012), is designed for and is the current textbook for humor studies programs including the AATH Humor Academy. It is also a text for numerous international humor studies courses and is available in various languages. The goals for writing this book were to affirm, sustain and encourage people in the practice of humor as a personal tool to optimize a healthy lifestyle and to maximize the benefits of humor in everyday life.

As the AATH Humor Academy founder and as a current administrator of the three-year CHP program, I continue to serve as an instructor and mentor for the program. I especially appreciate our AATH volunteers including psychologists and mental health professionals, who teach the Humor Academy and who review and update the on-line AATH research library.

My various career opportunities are deeply valued. However, my most treasured life experiences are as a parent of 4 amazing children and grandparent of 12 incredible (not biased at all) grandchildren. The quest to increase my knowledge of parenting, education and learning led to a pursuit of a master's degree in Adult Education. I was captivated with the concept of lifelong learning and in these classes I realized that my experiences as a parent and educator provided a unique perspective on the importance of humor and play. I also experienced first-hand, the critical importance of practicing playfulness as a survival skill in the everyday struggle of balancing work, classes and family life. When our youngest graduated from high school, I moved from the farm to be closer to my work at the Regional Office of Education. Eventually, I met and married Don Morrison, an incredible man who continues to provide love and laughter in my life. He is an inspiration in my career as an author and is always willing to serve as the first draft editor for my publications.

Don and I are REAL swingers – we have five swings hanging from the trees on our acreage and weather permitting, we swing while viewing spectacular Illinois sunsets. We also enjoy bike riding, hiking and travel. Peaceful moments working in my flower beds and creating in my art room are treasured. It has been a delight for us to travel internationally and spend time with some of my former students in Australia, Norway, Finland and Denmark.

#### ***2.4 Collaboration with my husband and family***

While I researched, wrote and published my books, I experienced joyful interactions with our grandchildren. I was instinctively aware that my influence as a grandparent could have a profound impact on their development. Creating positive memories was accomplished by engaging in playful connections. Subconsciously, I began to integrate theory into practice during interactions. In collaboration with my brilliant husband, we created *Legacy of Laughter: A Grandparent Guide and Playbook* (Morrison, 2021). Each grandchild has

blessed us with a unique perspective on play, laughter and fun. My photographer husband, Don, has chronicled their lives in photos. These became a visual representation of numerous playful activities in the LOL book. The grandkids share their art, poems and stories that highlight the laughter and love we have been blessed to experience.

My journey as an author and teacher has been shaped by over 40 years of exploring play and humor on both a personal and professional level. The first book, *Using Humor to Maximize Learning*, was written because I strongly believed that humor belongs in schools and is a critical component for mental health, teacher satisfaction and student success. As play is a trigger for laughter, it is important that we increase the opportunities for play, not only in our schools but also as an integral component of our professional and personal lives. *Using Humor to Maximize Living* emerged from the realization that laughter belongs not only in our schools, but in factories, hospitals, offices, funeral homes and homeless shelters. There is a universal desire for joy and happiness and, as such, humor is needed in all occupations and across all cultures. I continue to value international opportunities to present to groups on the importance of play as a trigger for laughter and the ways that humor provides mental health benefits. When someone asks me about my work, I am in awe of my life journey.

### 3. Ten questions and answers on humor, laughter and mental health

In this section, Freda and Ros pose ten questions to Mary Kay Morrison.

#### 3.1 What do you see as the key benefits of laughter and humor to mental health?

Six benefits are described in my book, *Using Humor to Maximize Learning*.

##### 3.1.1 Humor contributes to mind/body balance

Health nuts are going to feel stupid someday, lying in a hospital dying of nothing.

Redd Foxx.

A sense of humor can create a remarkable feeling of control. Learning to use humor as the binoculars for life's challenges can amplify confidence in your own internal power to cope. The purposeful use of humor enhances a sense of optimism. Humor elevates mood and has been known to be a deterrent to depression. Stress reduction is considered one of the most important benefits of humor. Medical institutions including the Mayo Clinic are sharing the scientific evidence on the benefits of laughter.

##### 3.1.2 Maximizes brain power

If you haven't got a sense of humor, you haven't any sense at all.

Mary McDonald.

Humor captures the attention of the brain. "Emotion drives attention and attention drives learning" (Sylwester, 1995). Our brain cannot learn if it is not attending. The surprise elements of humor alert the attentional center of the brain and increase the likelihood of memory storage and long-term retrieval (Sylwester, 2004).

##### 3.1.3 Enhances creativity

What do you call cheese that is not yours?

Nacho Cheese.

Creativity is the ability of the brain to bring together diverse ideas that will generate the thinking necessary for complex problem solving. Humor and creativity are wonderful companions, each a perfect complement for the other in nourishing thinking. Risk-taking is the nucleus of creativity and of humor; the freedom to express wild ideas activates spirited conversation and sparks the imagination. Humor increases the potential for divergent thinking and the capacity for solving complex problems.

### *3.1.4 Facilitates communication*

If you're going to tell people the truth, you'd better make them laugh. Otherwise, they'll kill you.  
George Bernard Shaw.

Using humor to build and maintain relationships is an invaluable skill. Emotional intelligence, the ability to perceive, assess and influence one's own and other people's emotions, is essential for knowing when and how to use humor effectively.

Humor generates trust among colleagues and can facilitate a reduction in tension, fear and anger. Leaders who can assist others in seeing the "humor" in difficult situations can nurture communication and ease tense situations. Laughter can quickly dispel tension and increase the capacity for dialogue. The use of humor as a tool in communication is rarely taught. However, it is the first thing that parents nurture in their children. Parents across cultures encourage their infant to smile and laugh.

### *3.1.5 Supports the change process*

Nothing new should be done for the very first time.

Our brains crave familiar patterns. We are used to a certain structure, procedure and familiar schedule in our everyday lives. When we experience unexpected change, suffering and/or loss in our lives, it disrupts our routine. But, when we are able to find humor in a difficult situation, we begin to heal and adapt. In fact, humor frequently emerges from the downside of our lives. Laughter and tears are closely related, which is why many comedians began their careers by laughing through the tragedy in their lives.

### *3.1.6 Creates an optimal environment and workplace culture*

An expert is one who knows more and more about less and less until he knows absolutely everything about nothing.

Murphy's Law.

Look for laughter, joy, spirit and enthusiasm in the workplace and you will find an environment in which learning and productivity thrive. A sense of humor contributes to an optimal work environment.

Trust is considered the basis for creating successful learning communities, because it facilitates teamwork and is the foundation for cultivating relationships. Laughter in an organization is an indicator of trust ([Yerkes, 2007](#)).

## **3.2 How can we train our sense of humor?**

Pump up with Practice: *Jest do it.*

Our sense of humor may be determined by both nature (personality) and nurture (environment.) Optimize your humor training.

- Begin with awareness of current humor practice. Start and maintain a humor journal.
- Include more fun in your day. Remember that play is a trigger for laughter.
- Spend more time with those who bring laughter to your life.

Purposefully join organizations that promote healthy humor such as International Society for Humor Studies and the non-profit AATH. There is no fee for the complimentary humor newsletter and/or monthly Humor Zoomer sessions.

## **3.3 Do you see any differences between laughing with and without humor?**

This research is ongoing and varied. Mike Cundall, author of *The Humor Hack* ([Cundall, 2022](#)) and a professor and colleague in the AATH, has been exploring this research. Here are his insights:

Laughter isn't always or even mostly related to some sort of humor stimulus according to researchers like Robert Provine. We know babies laugh early on as a sign of pleasure or enjoyment but it's doubtful they're finding things funny in the sense that most people use the term. People can also have what are called gelastic seizures where the symptom of the seizure is uncontrolled laughter. Neuroscientists can excite the area of the brain that causes laughter. People will laugh due to embarrassment. Personally, when I get on a roller coaster, I can't stop giggling. The moment I strap in, the giggles come. While we often associate laughter with humor, it seems that most laughter we experience is not related to humor.

### ***3.4 What are your thoughts on prescribing humor and laughter for health and well-being?***

Never take life too seriously, you won't get out alive. Elbert Hubbard.

The humor tonic is an extraordinary prescription. It is to be taken generously in unlimited amounts for overall health and well-being. It is remarkably effective as an antidote for stress, anxiety and depression:

Warning! This tonic is highly contagious. The side effects of humor may include incontinence, bellyaches, and exhaustion from constant laughter. If your laughter lasts for longer than 4 hours, share it with your health care provider.

The tonic of humor will add years to your life and life to your years! It takes courage and confidence to begin a purposeful humor practice. Add a generous dosage of play to generate laughter along with a prescription of the humor tonic:

- Integrate play into your practice. Do not be afraid of being silly or looking ridiculous. My own humor practice includes biking to the playground for the swings. Try the hula hoop and the pogo stick as part of an exercise routine.
- Create a humor jar with creative ideas for playful activities. Draw a slip when you need a dose of the humor tonic.
- Share the laughter. Laughter is contagious! Catch it and spread it!

### ***3.5 Can you tell us more about your concept of "humergy"?***

After years devoted to the field of humor studies, I have found that there are numerous research studies and theories about how to "get" a sense of humor. *Using Humor to Maximize Learning* (Morrison, 2008) includes descriptions of several characteristics associated with humor that had not previously been defined, including the terminology for "humergy":

Humergy is the energy that emerges from the joy and optimism of our inner spirit, reflects our unique personality, and nourishes a healthy mind/body balance.

Healthy relationships, optimism and trust nurture *humergy*. The benefits of humor continue to be researched by positive psychology and neuroscience scholars who are exploring the impact of humor on mental health and on well-being.

There are conditions that inhibit humergy and negatively affect the impact of a humor tonic formula, especially for those who may be uncomfortable using humor. Just as smoking or alcohol can reduce the benefit of drug treatment, humerphobia and humordoomers can negatively impact the benefits of humor.

### ***3.6 What do you suggest for people who feel uncomfortable with humor?***

If you experienced a lot of fun, play and laughter during childhood, then your humor style will be more beneficial than if you grew up with "humorphobia" or with an absence of play.

*Humorphobia* has been defined as the fear of fun, laughter and humor. It exists as a transparent thread often woven into the fabric of our lives. Most leaders are passionate about creating a “happy” workplace yet are hampered by an unspoken fear-based belief system that can permeate the environment. These concerns include:

- not having time for humor because of accountability expectations;
- losing “control”;
- being perceived as silly, unproductive and unprofessional;
- inability to tell a joke and inexperience in the use of humor (the subject of humor is not included in most curriculums or university programs);
- punishment or retaliation in an environment that is hostile or unaccustomed to humor; and
- being made fun of or being the brunt of jokes.

Any of these fears can increase stress and may limit the ability of individuals to use humor effectively. Humorphobia is often barely perceptible, yet it has a tremendous impact on the ability to sustain a humor practice. This fear of fun can impact everyone in the workplace by undermining confidence, stifling creativity and sabotaging humor practice.

A *humordoomer* is a person who consistently uses negative humor to control and manipulate others. Humorphobia breeds humordoomers, skilled crafters who use subtle techniques to suppress humor in the workplace. Humordoomers are usually unhappy individuals stressed by the dual demands of accountability and time constraints. They are pessimistic “leeches” who can suck the humergy right out of you. Grown in a “petri dish” of fear and anger, these folks are threatened by joyful energy and enthusiasm. They often use sarcasm or ridicule to manipulate others and to maintain a level of control in their world. Their negative humor reflects their unhappy immersion in the confining straits of a workaholic world. Often their techniques are so woven into the fabric of a culture that not only are they unaware of their own webbing effect, but their unsuspecting prey are oblivious as well.

Humorphobia and humordoomers can be a catalyst for sustaining an uncomfortable work environment and inhibiting humor practice. Collegial advice includes seeking relationships with humorous individuals and avoiding humordoomers when possible.

### ***3.7 How can people struggling deeply with illness and depression be motivated to enjoy humor and laugh?***

The cognitive emotional responses of our childhood become part of our humor being. If our lifelong experiences include a tendency to blame others or to feel victimized, helpless and angry, then it will be a challenge to move toward humergy. Self-awareness and acceptance of all of our feelings require intensive work, perhaps even therapy. If we understand our own painful feelings of fear and anger, then we are much more likely to have a healthy humor workout. *This self-analysis requires forgiveness of those who have hurt us as well as a forgiveness of ourselves.* Often dark, negative humor emerges from anger when forgiveness has not occurred. There is an emerging and promising field in psychology exploring the practice of therapeutic humor.

### ***3.8 Is laughing alone or solitary humor, important and why?***

Efforts to become aware of your own humor practices will give you invaluable information. This kind of reflection is often done alone. YES! Try to find the funny in yourself *by* yourself. Start with considering when and how you play, laugh and have fun. It may feel awkward at



first, but again, keeping a humor journal is the best way to record what tickles your funny bone.

### **3.9 How can humor be used to maximize learning?**

My book *Using Humor to Maximize Learning* (Morrison, 2008) explores the connections between neuroscience and humor. One of the key points in this book is that *humor nurtures the trusted relationships needed for engaged learning*. Excitement, enthusiasm, laughter and high energy are reflective of an engaged learning classroom based on cognitive research.

### **3.10 Do you see humor as a way to personal development and self-help and how?**

There are five stages of humor development that are somewhat age specific and originally defined in *Using Humor to Maximize Learning* (Morrison, 2008) and *Legacy of Laughter: A Grandparent Guide and Playbook* (Morrison, 2021). Play tickles the funny bone while nurturing physical strength, mental agility and social skills. Play is vital, not only for the growth and development of a child, but it is enormously beneficial for adults as well. Since play is a trigger for laughter, it is essential for developing a sense of humor.

**3.10.1 Peek-a-Boo (birth to two years).** There is a universal pattern to the initial stage of humor development beginning with infants learning to laugh. When the playful pattern of peek-a-boo is repeated, the baby learns to anticipate and participate in laughter. The process of evoking laughter with infants is initiated across cultures and is a vital characteristic of human development. The peek-a-boo interaction provides a foundation for many subsequent playful activities including the age-old game of “hide and seek.”

**3.10.2 Knock-Knock (two years to school age).** Pretending, exaggeration and creativity emerge in this stage of humor development. Make-believe activities and imagination are reflected in silly stories and fantasy drawings. Dramatic play usually imitates adult activities. Taboo words and laughter about body parts are common in early childhood. Jokes about elimination and “private” body parts are often accompanied with giggles.

**3.10.3 Riddle-De-Dee (early primary years).** A grasp of irony seems to emerge about six years of age as the developing brain begins to comprehend and appreciate the nuances of humor. This is first observed in the understanding and subsequent creating of jokes and riddles. Sharing riddles reflects significant cognitive growth and an appreciation of how language can create shared laughter.

**3.10.4 Pun-Fun (later primary years, Grades 4–8).** Children at this stage are moving toward an increased understanding of the subtle differences in language. Word play, language variations and the magic of language become a magnet that can captivate children through adulthood. It begins when a child can detect and enjoy the language twist in stories. Puns and gentle satire are appreciated at this age. Kids begin to make up their own jokes followed by hysterical laughing at their own genius.

**3.10.5 Joy-Flow (maturing humor style, high school to adult).** The ultimate goal for maturation of a *humor* being is for optimal growth and self-discovery. It involves the capacity to view life’s challenges with optimistic amusement. Becoming aware of one’s own sense of humor provides an opportunity to expand humergergy through playful humor practice. This experience of laughter’s impact supports mental health as the optimal state of Joy-Flow.

Collegial support is vital to beginning humor practice. Determine the people in your life who support your optimism and positive energy. Increase the amount of time you spend with them and limit the time spent with humordoomers. Seek out the funny people in your life and those who make you laugh. Practice humor with those you trust. Invite your colleagues to share the humor tonic as a mutually beneficial prescription for your lives. Laughing friends are invaluable!

## 4. Conclusion

In this case study, we met with Mary Kay Morrison, lifelong educator, past president of AATH (Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor) and founder/administrator of the AATH Humor Academy CHP (Certified Humor Professional) program. She is the author of several books including *Using Humor to Maximize Living* which is the text for numerous college courses and *Legacy of Laughter: A Grandparent Guide and Playbook*. She has coined the terms *Humergy* and *Humordoomer* to highlight the role that humor plays in contributing to optimism and positive mental health. Her five stages of Humor Development are used as a tool for humor studies.

## References

- Association of Applied and Therapeutic Humor (AATH) (2023), "AATH website", available at: [Association For Applied And Therapeutic Humor | United States \(aath.org\)](https://www.aath.org)
- Ben-Moshe, R. and Gonot-Schoupinsky, F. (2023), "Laughter, mental health and cancer: a case study of Ros Ben-Moshe", *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*, doi: [10.1108/MHSI-11-2022-0071](https://doi.org/10.1108/MHSI-11-2022-0071).
- Berger, A.A. and Gonot-Schoupinsky, F. (2023), "Humor and mental health: a case study of Arthur Asa Berger", *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*, Vol. 27 No. 1, pp. 37-50, doi: [10.1108/MHSI-08-2022-0051](https://doi.org/10.1108/MHSI-08-2022-0051).
- Cundall, M. (2022), *The Humor Hack: Using Humor to Feel Better, Increase Resilience, and (Yes) Enjoy Your Work*, Resource Publications, USA.
- Gonot-Schoupinsky, F.N., Garip, G. and Sheffield, D. (2020), "Laughter and humor for personal development: a systematic scoping review of the evidence", *European Journal of Integrative Medicine*, Vol. 37, p. 101144, doi: [10.1016/j.eujim.2020.101144](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2020.101144).
- Kataria, M., Ben-Moshe, R. and Gonot-Schoupinsky, F. (2023), "Laughter and mental health: a case study of Dr Madan Kataria", *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*, doi: [10.1108/MHSI-03-2023-0032](https://doi.org/10.1108/MHSI-03-2023-0032).
- Morrison, M.K. (2008), *Using Humor to Maximize Learning: The Links between Positive Emotions and Education*, Rowman & Littlefield Education, USA.
- Morrison, M.K. (2012), *Using Humor to Maximize Living: Connecting with Humor*, R&L Education, USA.
- Morrison, M.K. (2021), *Legacy of Laughter: A Grandparent Guide and Playbook*, Humor Quest, USA.
- Neal, M. and Gonot-Schoupinsky, F. (2022), "Laughter and mental health: a case study of Merv Neal", *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*, doi: [10.1108/MHSI-06-2022-0039](https://doi.org/10.1108/MHSI-06-2022-0039).
- Stiwi, K. and Rosendahl, J. (2022), "Efficacy of laughter-inducing interventions in patients with somatic or mental health problems: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized-controlled trials", *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, Vol. 47, p. 101552, doi: [10.1016/j.ctcp.2022.101552](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ctcp.2022.101552).
- Sylwester, R. (1995), *A Celebration of Neurons: An Educator's Guide to the Human Brain*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, USA.
- Sylwester, R. (2004), *How to Explain a Brain: An Educator's Handbook of Brain Terms and Cognitive Processes*, Corwin Press, USA.
- Yerkes, L. (2007), *Fun Works: Creating Places Where People Love to Work*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, USA.

## About the authors

Mary Kay Morrison is an Educator who has taught at every level of the educational spectrum, facilitating keynote presentations and workshop sessions for over 40 years. Her work includes integrating the application of cognitive research on emotions to the learning process. Mary Kay is the Founder and Director of Humor Quest, Past President of the Board of Directors for the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor (AATH) and recipient of the 2016 AATH Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2009, she founded and currently volunteers for the international AATH Humor Academy graduate study and Certified Humor Professional program. She integrated Humor and play in the development of "Train the Trainer" sessions on school improvement for the Illinois State Board of Education. She is the author of several books and publications about the importance of play and Humor for mental health and well-being.

Ros Ben-Moshe (MPH) is an internationally recognized Laughter Wellness and Positivity Expert. She is the Director of LaughLife Well-being Programs and adjunct lecturer at La Trobe University, where she has taught positive psychology and health promotion. A Global Laughter Ambassador, Ros is a regular commentator and writer in Australian media. Her highly praised first book is *Laughing at Cancer – How to Heal with Love, Laughter and Mindfulness*. She has spent over 20 years empowering people to embrace intentional smiling and laughter practices to generate positive life transformation and boost joy. Her second book *The Laughter Effect – How to Build Joy, Positivity and Resilience in Your Life* was published by Black Inc. in 2023.

Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky is undertaking a PhD in psychology on laughter prescription under the supervision of Professor Jerome Carson at Bolton University. She gained an MSc in health psychology in 2018, and a BA and MBA in the 1980s. She is a management consultant, for the last 20 years in Monaco. Her research interests include laughter and humour for health and wellbeing, research methodology, and prescribing laughter. Her contributions include the Laughie “Laugh Intentionally Everyday” laughter prescription, the Personal Development Theory of Laughter and Humour, the Humour Laughter Affect model, Differential Qualitative Analysis, FRAME-IT, the BPSE-B Health framework, and Pragmatic Autoethnography. Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: [fng1res@bolton.ac.uk](mailto:fng1res@bolton.ac.uk)

---

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:  
[www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm](http://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm)  
Or contact us for further details: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)