

# **20 positive psychology relevant abstracts** **may '16 newsletter**

(Capaldi, Passmore et al. 2015; Hayes and Hefferon 2015; Balzarotti, Biassoni et al. 2016; Bibeau, Dionne et al. 2016; Coffey, Wray-Lake et al. 2016; Cohen, Bavishi et al. 2016; Engeser and Baumann 2016; Fetterman, Bair et al. 2016; Fung, Ho et al. 2016; Giammarco 2016; Hill, Burrow et al. 2016; Jiang, Fung et al. 2016; Kaczmarek, Enko et al. 2016; Krejtz, Nezelek et al. 2016; Levitt and Piazza-Bonin 2016; Murray, Theakston et al. 2016; Rimfeld, Kovas et al. 2016; Twenge, Sherman et al. 2016; Vishkin, Bigman et al. 2016; Warren and McGraw 2016)

Balzarotti, S., F. Biassoni, et al. (2016). **"Individual differences in cognitive emotion regulation: Implications for subjective and psychological well-being."** *Journal of Happiness Studies* 17(1): 125-143. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10902-014-9587-3>

(Free full text available from ResearchGate) Although research has extensively examined the link between cognitive emotion regulation and psychopathological symptoms, scant attention has been given to the relationship between dispositional use of cognitive emotion regulation strategies and individuals' positive functioning. In a cross-sectional study on 470 adults, we examined whether individual differences in the use of nine cognitive strategies were associated with subjective and psychological well-being. Results show that positive reappraisal and refocus on planning are positively related to both subjective and psychological well-being. Rumination, catastrophizing and self-blame are linked to poorer well-being, while positive refocusing, putting into perspective, and acceptance show few significant associations. These results suggest that cognitive emotion regulation strategies may be differently effective in promoting individual's well-being. [Note: "Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ) The CERQ (Garnefski et al. 2001, 2002a, b) is a 36-item scale that evaluates nine cognitive strategies of emotion regulation (four items each). Positive reappraisal refers to the attempt of reinterpreting the event in terms of personal growth (e.g., "I think I can learn something from the situation"). Putting into perspective refers to thoughts emphasizing the relativity of the event when comparing it to other (more serious) situations (e.g., "I tell myself that there are worse things in life"). Positive refocusing refers to the attempt of thinking about pleasant and happy situations instead of thinking about the harmful event (e.g., "I think of something nice instead of what has happened"). Refocus on planning consists in thoughts about what to and how to face the negative event (e.g., "I think about a plan of what I can do best"). Acceptance refers to thoughts of resigning oneself to what has happened (e.g., "I think that I must learn to live with it"). Self-blame and Blaming Others consist in thoughts putting the blame of what has happened on oneself versus others (e.g., "I feel that I am the one to blame for it"). Rumination refers to thinking about the feelings experienced as a consequence of the negative event (e.g., "I dwell upon the feelings the situation has evoked in me"). Catastrophizing consists in the emphasis of the negative aspects of the event (e.g., "I often think that what I have experienced is the worst that can happen to a person"). Respondents are asked to indicate what they generally think when experiencing negative or unpleasant events. The items are rated on a Likert scale ranging from one (almost never) to five (almost always)].

Bibeau, M., F. Dionne, et al. (2016). **"Can compassion meditation contribute to the development of psychotherapists' empathy? A review."** *Mindfulness* 7(1): 255-263. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12671-015-0439-y>

Over the last three decades, a growing number of scientists and clinicians have been investigating the utility of meditative practices as attention and emotion regulation strategies. Many studies have provided evidence that mindfulness meditation can have positive effects on psychotherapists' capacity to offer presence, acceptance and empathy to their clients. More recently, loving-kindness meditation and compassion meditation have become the focus of scientific scrutiny as it has been thought that they could have even more impact on psychotherapists' empathy than mindfulness meditation. This article reviews the scientific literature on loving-kindness and compassion meditation regarding particularly the potential impact of these meditative practices on the development of psychotherapists' empathy. Studies in neuroscience have shown that loving-kindness and compassion meditation actually change the brain in areas associated with positive emotions and empathy. Loving-kindness and compassion meditation training studies have shown positive impacts on a number of empathy-related variables such as altruism, positive regard, prosocial behavior, interpersonal relationships, as well as affective empathy and empathic accuracy. Moreover, loving-kindness and compassion meditation actually reduce negative affects associated to empathy for pain, thus reducing the risk of psychotherapists' burnout and enhancing their self-care. It is concluded that loving-kindness and compassion meditation would constitute an important and useful addition to every counselling or psychotherapy training curriculum.

Capaldi, C. A., H.-A. Passmore, et al. (2015). **"Flourishing in nature: A review of the benefits of connecting with nature and its application as a wellbeing intervention."** *International Journal of Wellbeing* 5(4): 1-16  
<http://www.internationaljournalofwellbeing.org/index.php/ijow/article/view/449>

(Available in free full text) From the increasing number of people living in urban areas to the continued degradation of the natural environment, many of us appear to be physically and psychologically disconnected from nature. We consider the theoretical explanations and present evidence for why this state of affairs might result in suboptimal levels of hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing by reviewing the large body of research on the mental health benefits of connecting with nature. The advantages of contact with nature as a potential wellbeing intervention are discussed, and examples of how this research is being applied to reconnect individuals to nature and improve wellbeing are given. We conclude by considering the limitations of, and proposing future directions for, research in this area. Overall, evidence suggests that connecting with nature is one path to flourishing in life.

Coffey, J. K., L. Wray-Lake, et al. (2016). **"A multi-study examination of well-being theory in college and community samples."** *Journal of Happiness Studies* 17(1): 187-211. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10902-014-9590-8>

(Available in free full text from ResearchGate) Well-being theory (WBT) proposes five indicators of well-being [i.e., positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, achievement (PERMA)] that are, independently, empirically supported predictors of flourishing (i.e., an optimal level of well-being; Seligman in Flourish: a visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being. Free Press, NY, 2011). However, there is limited empirical support for the multidimensional model suggested by WBT. Two studies sought to test and validate the higher-order factor structure of the five components of PERMA and PERMA's ability to predict concurrent and prospective flourishing outcomes (e.g., physical health, college success). In Study 1, a longitudinal examination of college students, participants completed measures of well-being (including four of the five PERMA indicators), physical health, and college success at the end of their sophomore, junior, and senior years. In Study 2, a larger, cross-sectional study was conducted online to further validate the PERMA model with a broader sample and all five PERMA indicators. Participants completed measures similar to those administered at Study 1 and other measures used to validate Study

1 measures. Results from Study 2 further validated the PERMA model by comparing Study 1 measures to established measures and by adding meaning to the model. Study 1 and Study 2 PERMA models predicted markers of well-being (e.g., vitality, life satisfaction) and flourishing (e.g., physical health). The two studies reported here provide cross-sectional and longitudinal support that WBT is useful for predicting flourishing. [Note 'Achievement' was measured using an assessment of 'Grit' - the ability to show strong willpower in following up on projects/goals].

Cohen, R., C. Bavishi, et al. (2016). **"Purpose in life and its relationship to all-cause mortality and cardiovascular events: A meta-analysis."** *Psychosomatic Medicine* 78(2): 122-133. [http://journals.lww.com/psychosomaticmedicine/Fulltext/2016/02000/Purpose\\_in\\_Life\\_and\\_Its\\_Relationship\\_to\\_All\\_Cause.2.aspx](http://journals.lww.com/psychosomaticmedicine/Fulltext/2016/02000/Purpose_in_Life_and_Its_Relationship_to_All_Cause.2.aspx)

Objective: To assess the net impact of purpose in life on all-cause mortality and cardiovascular events. Methods: The electronic databases PubMed, Embase, and PsycINFO were systematically searched through June 2015 to identify all studies investigating the relationship between purpose in life, mortality, and cardiovascular events. Articles were selected for inclusion if, a) they were prospective, b) evaluated the association between some measure of purpose in life and all-cause mortality and/or cardiovascular events, and c) unadjusted and/or adjusted risk estimates and confidence intervals (CIs) were reported. Results: Ten prospective studies with a total of 136,265 participants were included in the analysis. A significant association was observed between having a higher purpose in life and reduced all-cause mortality (adjusted pooled relative risk = 0.83 [CI = 0.75–0.91],  $p < .001$ ) and cardiovascular events (adjusted pooled relative risk = 0.83 [CI = 0.75–0.92],  $p = .001$ ). Subgroup analyses by study country of origin, questionnaire used to measure purpose in life, age, and whether or not participants with baseline cardiovascular disease were included in the study all yielded similar results. Conclusions: Possessing a high sense of purpose in life is associated with a reduced risk for all-cause mortality and cardiovascular events. Future research should focus on mechanisms linking purpose in life to health outcomes, as well as interventions to assist individuals identified as having a low sense of purpose in life.

Engeser, S. and N. Baumann (2016). **"Fluctuation of flow and affect in everyday life: A second look at the paradox of work."** *Journal of Happiness Studies* 17(1): 105-124. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10902-014-9586-4>  
Studies with the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) have shown that individuals experience more flow at work than at leisure. This indicates that people enjoy working but paradoxically at the same time leisure activities are preferred ("paradox of work"). We took a second look at the paradox of work by measuring flow directly, including affect measures, and differentiating between active and passive leisure activities. We also adopted a dynamical approach based on the idea that the transitions of experiences has to be taken into account to get the total picture. For the period of 1 week, data of 100 employees with different professions were collected with the ESM (in total 4,504 measurements). In accordance with existing work, we found that flow was high during work. It was slightly (albeit significantly) higher than during active leisure activities and considerably higher than during passive leisure activities. At the same time, negative activation was low during passive and active leisure activities and lower than during work and vice versa for valence (happiness). Thus, leisure activities do have a positive affective quality that could explain why people prefer leisure to work. Regarding the dynamical approach, we tested whether flow during work would lead to higher valence in leisure but could not support this assumption. We discussed the findings and made suggestions for future research. In an additional analysis, we reveal that perceived outcome experience could partially explain why work and leisure experience differed.

Fetterman, A. K., J. L. Bair, et al. (2016). **"The scope and consequences of metaphoric thinking: Using individual differences in metaphor usage to understand how metaphor functions."** *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 110(3): 458-476 <http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/psp/110/3/458/>  
People often think, feel, and behave metaphorically according to conceptual metaphor theory. There are normative sources of support for this theory, but individual differences have received scant attention. This is surprising because people are likely to differ in the frequency with which they use metaphors and, therefore, the frequency with which they experience the costs and benefits of metaphoric thinking. To investigate these ideas, a 5-study program of research (total N = 532) was conducted. Study 1 developed and validated a Metaphor Usage Measure (MUM), finding that people were fairly consistent in their tendencies toward literal thought and language on the one hand versus metaphoric thought and language on the other. These differences were, in turn, consequential. Although metaphor usage predicted susceptibility to metaphor transfer effects (Studies 2 and 3), it was also linked to higher levels of emotional understanding (Studies 4 and 5). The findings provide support for several key premises of conceptual metaphor theory in the context of a new measure that can be used to track the consequences of metaphoric thinking. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2016 APA, all rights reserved)

Fung, H. H., Y. W. Ho, et al. (2016). **"Age differences in personal values: Universal or cultural specific?"** *Psychol Aging*. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26950224>  
Prior studies on value development across adulthood have generally shown that as people age, they espouse communal values more strongly and agentic values less strongly. Two studies investigated whether these age differences in personal values might differ according to cultural values. Study 1 examined whether these age differences in personal values, and their associations with subjective well-being, showed the same pattern across countries that differed in individualism-collectivism. Study 2 compared age differences in personal values in the Canadian culture that emphasized agentic values more and the Chinese culture that emphasized communal values more. Personal and cultural values of each individual were directly measured, and their congruence were calculated and compared across age and cultures. Findings revealed that across cultures, older people had lower endorsement of agentic personal values and higher endorsement of communal personal values than did younger people. These age differences, and their associations with subjective well-being, were generally not influenced by cultural values. (PsycINFO Database Record)

Giammarco, E. A. (2016). **"The measurement of individual differences in morality."** *Personality and Individual Differences* 88: 26-34. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0191886915005449>  
(Available in free full text) Within psychology many approaches have been taken to investigate morality. Arguably, the most prominent approach has been the use of moral reasoning, which is concerned with how individuals arrive at a decision on how they ought to behave. Kohlberg (1958) championed the empirical investigation of individual differences in moral reasoning and his early efforts continue to influence morality research today. This paper will review Kohlberg's seminal model of moral development and explore the assessments that have been created to measure the six stages of development described in this model. In addition, alternative morality theories and their most prominent assessments will be discussed, including the Neo-Kohlbergian approach, Gilligan's Moral Orientations Theory, and Moral Foundations Theory. In closing, the current state of morality assessments will be reviewed, along with recommendations for future development.

Hayes, M. C. and K. Hefferon (2015). **"Not like rose-tinted glasses... like taking a pair of dirty glasses off': A pilot intervention using positive emotions in expressive writing."** *International Journal of Wellbeing* 5(4): 78-95. <http://www.internationaljournalofwellbeing.org/index.php/ijow/article/view/435>

(Available in free full text) Studies conducted in various contexts and with varied populations have found expressive writing enhances physical and psychological wellbeing. This pilot intervention study countered the predominantly quantitative evidence by adopting a qualitative methodology, exploring the experience of using positive emotions in expressive writing. Participants (n = 10), who all had previous experience in expressive writing, were asked to select one of ten positive emotion cards (PECs) each day for three days. Participants were then asked to write expressively through the 'lens' of their chosen emotion. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and experiences were evaluated using Thematic Analysis. The results identified two main themes that compared the experience of expressive writing both with and without the PECs. The first theme, Processing (without the PECs) contained three sub-themes: sense of relief, habitual perspective and reactive to experience. The second main theme, Progressing (with the PECs) contained three different sub-themes: sense of direction, changed perspective and interactive with experience. This study found that, for expressive writers, positive emotions may function in three ways: to relate to others or self-expand, to move past challenges cognitively or change unconstructive perspectives, and finally as a way to interactively link or 'bridge' from the written subject matter to constructive action, thus breaking cycles of reactive writing and rumination. Implications of the study on the practice of expressive writing and its potential as a positive psychology intervention (PPI) are discussed.

Hill, P. L., A. L. Burrow, et al. (2016). **"Persevering with positivity and purpose: An examination of purpose commitment and positive affect as predictors of grit."** *Journal of Happiness Studies* 17(1): 257-269. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10902-014-9593-5>

(Free full text available from ResearchGate) Grit, defined as a passion and perseverance for one's goals, has been consistently demonstrated as an adaptive resource across multiple domains. Less explored, however, are the correlates of and sources from which grit is derived. The current studies examined two plausible candidates for promoting grit, positive affect and commitment to a purpose, using college student samples from Canada and the United States. Study 1 confirmed our predictions that grittier students tended to report greater positive affect and purpose commitment, and demonstrated that these variables appear to be unique and independent predictors of grit. Study 2 examined these claims using two-wave data collected across a semester, and found that while both purpose and positive affect were initially correlated with grit, only initial levels of purpose predicted grit at wave two. In other words, having a life direction may help more than positive affect when predicting who is likely to become grittier over a college semester. Implications of these findings are discussed.

Jiang, D., H. H. Fung, et al. (2016). **"Limited time perspective increases the value of calm."** *Emotion* 16(1): 52-62. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26214569>

Previous findings indirectly suggest that the more people perceive their time in life as limited, the more they value calm. No study, however, has directly tested this hypothesis. To this end, using a combination of survey, experience sampling, and experimental methods, we examined the relationship between future time perspective and the affective states that people ideally want to feel (i.e., their "ideal affect"). In Study 1, the more people reported a limited time perspective, the more they wanted to feel calm and experience other low-arousal positive states. In Study 2, participants were randomly assigned to a limited time or an expanded time condition. Participants in the limited time condition reported valuing calm and other low arousal positive states more than those in the expanded time condition. We discuss the implications of these findings for broadening our understanding of the factors that shape how people ideally want to feel, and their consequences for decision making.

Kaczmarek, L. D., J. Enko, et al. (2016). **"Would you be happier if you looked better? A focusing illusion."** *Journal of Happiness Studies* 17(1): 357-365. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10902-014-9598-0>

(Available in free full text) Some people might believe that individuals who are more satisfied with their body are also happier. However, people tend to overrate the influence of some factors (e.g. money or health) on their happiness; a phenomenon termed the focusing illusion. Our aim was to examine the focusing illusion in relation to body satisfaction. We experimentally manipulated body satisfaction and life satisfaction focus by varying the order of relevant measurement scales. Volunteers (N = 97) completed two questionnaires placed in separate envelopes to control the order of scales administration. Participants either completed the Body Satisfaction Scale followed by the Satisfaction with Life Scale or vice versa. In line with the focusing illusion the association between body satisfaction and life satisfaction was significantly stronger when participants were asked about their body satisfaction first. Body satisfaction as a focusing illusion may need to be considered by scientist as well as lay people who try to look better and be happier. [See too the interesting review of this study on the BPS Digest - <http://digest.bps.org.uk/2016/02/would-you-really-be-happier-if-you-were.html>].

Krejtz, I., J. B. Nezlek, et al. (2016). **"Counting one's blessings can reduce the impact of daily stress."** *Journal of Happiness Studies* 17(1): 25-39. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10902-014-9578-4>

(Available in free full text) Participants in the present study, adults living in the community, described their well-being and the stress they experienced each day for 2 weeks. Before completing these diaries each day, half of the participants described the things for which they felt grateful that day, and half completed the diaries without doing this. Multilevel modeling analyses found that daily feelings of gratitude were positively related to well-being at the within-person level, and lagged analyses suggested a causal link from well-being to gratitude. In addition, relationships between daily stress and daily well-being were weaker for people who had been asked to think about the things for which they were grateful than they were for those who had not been asked. These results suggest that counting one's blessing can reduce the negative effects of daily stress, which in turn may have positive long-term effects on mental health.

Levitt, H. M. and E. Piazza-Bonin (2016). **"Wisdom and psychotherapy: Studying expert therapists' clinical wisdom to explicate common processes."** *Psychother Res* 26(1): 31-47. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10503307.2014.937470>

OBJECTIVE: This research study explores the concept of clinical wisdom. METHOD: Seventeen psychologists who were nominated multiple times by their peers as wise clinicians participated in an interview on clinical wisdom, analyzed using grounded-theory methods. RESULTS: Participants described clinical wisdom as accepting that the best answers to clients' problems often were not immediately accessible and instead using their sense of their clients, their theory of psychotherapy, and their own experiences of adversity, diversity, and intimate relationships to help clients explore the ambiguities and vulnerabilities they experienced to craft idiosyncratic answers. CONCLUSIONS: An understanding of clinical wisdom is put forward, characterized by markers and principles for practice, to guide therapy processes within therapists' intentionality and direct research on common factors.

Murray, J., A. Theakston, et al. (2016). **"Can the attention training technique turn one marshmallow into two? Improving children's ability to delay gratification."** *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 77: 34-39.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0005796715300589>

The seminal Marshmallow Test (Mischel & Ebbesen, 1970) has reliably demonstrated that children who can delay gratification are more likely to be emotionally stable and successful later in life. However, this is not good news for those children who can't delay. Therefore, this study aimed to explore whether a metacognitive therapy technique, Attention Training (ATT: Wells, 1990) can improve young children's ability to delay gratification. One hundred children participated. Classes of 5-6 year olds were randomly allocated to either the ATT or a no-intervention condition and were tested pre and post-intervention on ability to delay gratification, verbal inhibition (executive control), and measures of mood. The ATT intervention significantly increased (2.64 times) delay of gratification compared to the no-intervention condition. After controlling for age and months in school, the ATT intervention and verbal inhibition task performance were significant independent predictors of delay of gratification. These results provide evidence that ATT can improve children's self-regulatory abilities with the implication that this might reduce psychological vulnerability later in life. The findings highlight the potential contribution that the Self-Regulatory Executive Function (S-REF) model could make to designing techniques to enhance children's self-regulatory processes.

Rimfeld, K., Y. Kovas, et al. (2016). **"True grit and genetics: Predicting academic achievement from personality."** *J Pers Soc Psychol*. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26867111>

Grit-perseverance and passion for long-term goals has been shown to be a significant predictor of academic success, even after controlling for other personality factors. Here, for the first time, we use a U.K.-representative sample and a genetically sensitive design to unpack the etiology of Grit and its prediction of academic achievement in comparison to well-established personality traits. For 4,642 16-year-olds (2,321 twin pairs), we used the Grit-S scale (perseverance of effort and consistency of interest), along with the Big Five personality traits, to predict grades on the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams, which are administered U.K.-wide at the end of compulsory education. Twin analyses of Grit perseverance yielded a heritability estimate of 37% (20% for consistency of interest) and no evidence for shared environmental influence. Personality, primarily conscientiousness, predicts about 6% of the variance in GCSE grades, but Grit adds little to this prediction. Moreover, multivariate twin analyses showed that roughly two-thirds of the GCSE prediction is mediated genetically. Grit perseverance of effort and Big Five conscientiousness are to a large extent the same trait both phenotypically ( $r = 0.53$ ) and genetically (genetic correlation = 0.86). We conclude that the etiology of Grit is highly similar to other personality traits, not only in showing substantial genetic influence but also in showing no influence of shared environmental factors. Personality significantly predicts academic achievement, but Grit adds little phenotypically or genetically to the prediction of academic achievement beyond traditional personality factors, especially conscientiousness.

Twenge, J. M., R. A. Sherman, et al. (2016). **"More happiness for young people and less for mature adults: Time period differences in subjective well-being in the United States, 1972-2014."** *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 7(2): 131-141. <http://spp.sagepub.com/content/7/2/131.abstract>

Are Americans happier, or less happy, than they used to be? The answer may depend on life stage. We examined indicators of subjective well-being (SWB) in four nationally representative samples of U.S. adolescents (aged 13-18 years,  $n = 1.27$  million) and adults (aged 18-96 years,  $n = 54,172$ ). Recent adolescents reported greater happiness and life satisfaction than their predecessors, and adults over age 30 were less happy in recent years. Among adults, the previously established positive correlation between age and happiness has dwindled, disappearing by the early 2010s. Mixed-effects analyses primarily demonstrated time period rather than generational effects. The effect of time period on SWB is about  $d = |.13|$  in most age groups, about the size of reported links between SWB and objective health, marital status, being a parent, and volunteering.

Vishkin, A., Y. E. Bigman, et al. (2016). **"God rest our hearts: Religiosity and cognitive reappraisal."** *Emotion* 16(2): 252-262. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26461249>

Although religiosity is often accompanied by more intense emotions, we propose that people who are more religious may be better at using 1 of the most effective emotion regulation strategies-namely, cognitive reappraisal. We argue that religion, which is a meaning-making system, is linked to better cognitive reappraisal, which involves changing the meaning of emotional stimuli. Four studies ( $N = 2,078$ ) supported our hypotheses. In Study 1, religiosity was associated with more frequent use of cognitive reappraisal in 3 distinct religions (i.e., Islam, Christianity, Judaism). In Studies 2A-2B, we replicated these findings using 2 indices of cognitive reappraisal and in a large representative sample. In Studies 3-4, individuals more (vs. less) religious were more effective in using cognitive reappraisal in the laboratory. We discuss how these findings inform our understanding of the psychology of religion and of emotion regulation.

Warren, C. and A. P. McGraw (2016). **"Differentiating what is humorous from what is not."** *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 110(3): 407-430 <http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/psp/110/3/407/>

After 2.5 millennia of philosophical deliberation and psychological experimentation, most scholars have concluded that humor arises from incongruity. We highlight 2 limitations of incongruity theories of humor. First, incongruity is not consistently defined. The literature describes incongruity in at least 4 ways: surprise, juxtaposition, atypicality, and a violation. Second, regardless of definition, incongruity alone does not adequately differentiate humorous from nonhumorous experiences. We suggest revising incongruity theory by proposing that humor arises from a benign violation: something that threatens a person's well-being, identity, or normative belief structure but that simultaneously seems okay. Six studies, which use entertainment, consumer products, and social interaction as stimuli, reveal that the benign violation hypothesis better differentiates humorous from nonhumorous experiences than common conceptualizations of incongruity. A benign violation conceptualization of humor improves accuracy by reducing the likelihood that joyous, amazing, and tragic situations are inaccurately predicted to be humorous.