

Research Reports

No Occasion for Pleasure: The Self-Worth Contingency of a Setback and Coping With Humor

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Abstract

Whether or not one uses humor to cope with a setback may depend on the idiosyncratic relation of the setback to feeling of self-worth. All people pursue the higher order goal of self-validation, but people differ in what domains of life their self-worth is contingent upon and to what extent. In this article based on an incongruity theory of humor we argue that the use of humor in coping with a highly self-worth-contingent setback may be impeded by two cognitive-motivational processes: goal-driven activation and goal shielding. From the outlined theory we derived the hypothesis that the more a domain is contingent upon self-worth, the less likely a person will be to use humor to deal with a setback in that domain. We tested this hypothesis in two studies employing two forms of self-report, i.e., ratings of reaction likelihood to setbacks described at an abstract domain level (Study 1), and ranking of reaction likelihood to concrete setbacks from different domains (Study 2). The hypothesis was affirmed in different domains of self-worth contingency controlling for the influence of habitual coping with humor, coping by disengagement, and global self-esteem.

Keywords: self-worth, self-worth contingency, self-regulation, coping with humor

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On account of humor, the ego “refuses to be hurt by the arrows of reality or to be compelled to suffer. It insists that it is impervious to wounds dealt by the outside world, in fact, that these are merely occasions for affording it pleasure” (Freud, 1928, p. 2).

Introduction

Humor is believed to be *the* strategy for coping with setbacks and failures. Empirical research has backed this favorable view insofar as coping with humor appears to be an effective and functional strategy for regulating stress, negative and positive emotions, and self-threat and coping with trauma (Geisler & Weber, 2010; Kuiper, 2012; for an overview, see Martin, 2007). However, even though coping with humor has positive consequences such as more positive cognitive appraisals in the face of stress, greater positive affect in response to negative life events, a more positive personality (impression), and better quality in interpersonal relations (Cann, Stilwell, & Taku, 2010; Geisler, Wiedig-Allison, & Weber, 2009; Martin, Kuiper, Olinger, & Dance, 1993; Saroglou, Lacour,

& Demeure, 2010), humor is unfortunately a rarely used strategy of coping (Weber & Wiedig-Allison, 2007). Being attached to so many psychological advantages, the question remains: What barriers prevent us from coping with humor?

To shed light on this question we investigated coping with humor from the perspective of self-worth contingency theory (Crocker & Park, 2004; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). A self-worth contingency describes the degree to which a person's feeling of self-worth depends on meeting standards in a particular life domain, for example, being successful in academia or having appealing looks. We postulate that when people have to cope with a setback in a domain on which their self-worth is contingent (i.e., in which success and failure have an impact on the feeling of self-worth), then it is unlikely that they will use humor as a coping strategy. We base our proposition on an incongruity theory of humor (Veatch, 1998) and empirical findings on cognitive processes related to goal pursuit (Dijksterhuis & Aarts, 2010; Förster, Liberman, & Higgins, 2005; Shah, Friedman, & Kruglanski, 2002). In our view, self-worth contingencies inhibit cognitive and motivational processes that underlie humor generation.

Humor Incongruity Theory

According to a widely held assumption, coping with humor entails a specific cognitive shift with regard to a person's construal of the aversive situation (Abel, 2002; Geisler & Weber, 2010; Kuiper, McKenzie, & Belanger, 1995). Rather than proposing an outright denial of a negative experience, a humor-specific construction re-construes the experience as acceptable. Construing a situation as a negative experience on the one hand and as acceptable on the other hand is a form of incongruity. Concepts of humor that are based on the idea of incongruity have a long tradition (for an overview see Martin, 2007). A recent incongruity theory of humor was proposed by Veatch (1998). According to Veatch, humor is supposed to be experienced when a person evaluates a situation as a violation of a subjective principle to which he or she is committed (i.e., the situation is not the way it ought to be), but at the same time, the situation is viewed as acceptable and normal, with the latter view predominating. The three conditions that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for humor to occur are V (for violation of principle), N (for normal or acceptable), and the simultaneity of V and N. In generating humor for the sake of coping, V is what turns a situation into a coping situation. In line with Veatch's theory (1998), in order to cope by using humor, it would be necessary to additionally construe the situation as acceptable (N). But under what circumstances can a setback be experienced as obviously not right (V) *and* acceptable (N) at the same time? In our view, the self-worth contingency of a setback is a pivotal factor for construing an event as acceptable and clearing the way for humor.

Self-Worth Contingency Theory

People want to experience the feeling of being valuable. A self-worth contingency describes the degree to which a person's feeling of self-worth depends on meeting standards in a particular domain (Crocker & Park, 2004; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). A high self-worth contingency in one domain indicates that success or failure in that domain will result in strong emotional reactions and thus will have impact on the person's sense of self-worth (Zeigler-Hill, Besser, & King, 2011). For example, for a person whose self-worth depends on approval from others to a great extent, not being invited to a party will have a high negative impact on the person's feelings of self-worth. Although people generally experience positive affect following success and negative affect following failure, when self-worth is at stake affect and self-esteem will both be effected (Wolfe & Crocker, 2003). Thus, a contingent setback may be less tolerable or acceptable than a non-contingent setback and in turn, a person will be less likely to use humor to cope with the setback. In the present paper, we go beyond this common-sense argument by outlining goal-related cognitive processes that may explain why a self-worth contingency could make coping with humor unlikely.

Domains of Self-Worth Contingencies

In a domain with a high contingency of self-worth, a person will pursue concrete goals in order to meet standards and will thereby ultimately pursue the potent higher order goal of self-validation. For example, a student who needs to believe she is competent in order to see herself as having worth or value may have the goal of going to lectures regularly in order to do well in her exams. People differ in the domains on which they base their self-esteem on. Possible domains with self-worth contingencies are *the approval of others, appearance, doing well in competitions, competence, family support, virtue, and God's love*. Crocker and Wolfe (2001) derived these domains from the literature, validated their stable existence in a college student population, and constructed a self-report measure to assess trait self-worth contingencies. This measure assesses people's perceived sense that their own judgments of self-worth are influenced by events in each domain. Contingencies of self-worth have motivational consequences. They influence the selection of situations, endurance in goal pursuit, and response to success and failure (Wolfe & Crocker, 2003). The pursuit of self-esteem is judged to have its costs. For example, costs to autonomy, learning, relationships, and health (Crocker & Park, 2004).

Humor, Self-Worth, and Goal-Related Cognitive Processes

Empirical results support the close relation between humor and self-esteem. Self-reported coping with humor was shown to be positively associated with global self-esteem and significantly negatively associated with self-rated actual-ideal discrepancies (Kuiper & Martin, 1993; Martin et al., 1993). We propose that coping with humor and contingencies of self-worth are linked by cognitive and motivational processes that underlie self-worth contingency. Contingencies of self-worth are hypothesized to guide attention to and interpretations of potentially contingency-relevant events (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). More precisely, cognitions that build the appraisal may stay activated and may therefore be highly accessible due to the potent higher order goal of self-validation that is linked to self-worth contingencies (Crocker & Park, 2004). The reason why the goal of self-validation may keep the interpretation activated is that goals direct attention and attention determines the activation of cognitions (Dijksterhuis & Aarts, 2010). Furthermore, it is feasible to expect that an interpretation of an event as a failure will be more easily accessed and will be accessible for longer than a success interpretation because unfulfilled goals maintain the activation of goal-related cognitions (Förster et al., 2005). Additionally, we assume that the goal of self-validation not only makes a failure appraisal highly accessible but also makes it less likely that the person will appraise the situation as acceptable and will thereby thwart the person's ability to use humor as a coping mechanism. Our claim rests on the finding that goal commitment inhibits the activation of cognitions that are related to alternative goal representations (Shah et al., 2002). In the context of contingency-related failure, this cognitive process of goal shielding protects the pursuit of self-validation from becoming the pursuit of alternative goals that actually could aid the person in appraising a situation as acceptable. An alternative goal that could aid a person in appraising a situation as acceptable might be the goal of increasing positive emotions or enhancing interpersonal closeness (Sar-El, Mikulincer, & Doron, 2013).

To conclude, we postulate that setbacks in a domain with a high contingency of self-worth will cause strong failure appraisals (V) and fewer appraisals of acceptability (N) due to goal-driven cognitive activation and goal shielding. Thus, V and N, the necessary and sufficient conditions for humor according to the incongruity theory of humor (Veatch, 1998) may be unlikely in the context of contingency-related failure.

The Present Research

The main aim of the present research was to test the hypothesis that the more a domain is contingent upon self-worth, the less likely a person will be to use humor to deal with setbacks. We tested our hypotheses in two studies.

In Study 1 we assessed global self-esteem and self-worth contingencies at the trait level via self-reports and the self-judged likelihood of reactions to setbacks in domains with self-worth contingencies. The reactions we included were coping with humor and two disengagement strategies. Humor and disengagement are two forms of coping that are associated at the state and trait levels (Weber & Wiedig-Allison, 2007). As our focus was on the unique influence of the self-worth contingency on coping with humor, it was necessary to include disengagement strategies in the study. The question guiding our statistical analysis was: Is self-worth contingency negatively associated with using humor as a coping mechanism after controlling for the influence of habitual use of humor, disengagement, and global self-esteem? Additionally, we tested whether the proposed negative association between self-worth contingency and coping with humor was moderated by the level of global self-esteem. This could be the case as Park and Maner (2009) found that global self-esteem moderated the effect of contingent self-threat on coping behavior. In Study 2 we exchanged ratings of reactions to self-worth contingent setbacks in different domains with a ranking order task. The task consisted of five concrete descriptions of setbacks. Each setback belonged to a different domain of self-worth contingency. Participants rank ordered the five setbacks according to the likelihood of reacting with humor. The ranking level of measurement drops from interval to ordinal by exchanging rating (Study 1) with ranking (Study 2). Nevertheless we aimed at gaining validity by having the participant compare concrete setbacks and by averaging the likelihood of reacting with humor across different situations. The question guiding our statistical analysis was: Is the self-worth contingency of a domain negatively associated with the average likelihood-of-reacting-with-humor rank?

Study 1

Method

Participants and Procedure — One hundred twenty undergraduates ($M_{\text{age}} = 22.25$ years, $SD = 5.18$, 78% women) filled out a questionnaire package in return for course credit.

Measures — Participants filled in following self-reports:

- **Contingencies of self-worth.** Contingencies of self-worth were assessed with a German translation of the Contingencies of Self-Worth Scale (CSWS; Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, & Bouvrette, 2003). The domains were approval from others, appearance, competition, competence, family support, and virtue.¹ Each domain included five items. Participants rated how well each item described them on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*do not agree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Scale scores were computed by averaging. For descriptive statistics see Table 1.
- **Global self-esteem.** Global self-esteem was assessed by the 10-item revised version of the German adaptation of Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965; von Collani & Herzberg, 2003). Scale scores were computed by averaging. Descriptive statistics were: $M = 2.26$, $SD = 0.54$, $\alpha = .87$.
- **Reactions to self-worth-contingent events.** Reactions to self-worth-contingent events were assessed by describing a domain-specific failure with one sentence followed by nine items assessing reactions to that failure. The failures (and related domains) were (a) experiencing rejection from others (*approval from others*), (b) feeling that one does not look good (*appearance*), (c) performing poorly in a competitive situation (*competition*), (d) having a poor academic performance (*competence*), (e) realizing that one's family doesn't support what one does (*family support*), and (f) not acting according to moral standards (*virtue*). Participants rated the likelihood of a reaction on a 10-point scale ranging from 0 (*very unlikely*) to 9 (*very likely*). Four items taken from the Coping Humor Scale (Martin & Lefcourt, 1983) assessed coping with humor; one item assessed putting things into perspective ("I tell myself there are worse situations"), one item assessed distraction ("I try to distract myself"), and the remaining three items were filler items. One scale score for coping with humor was computed by averaging. For descriptive statistics, see Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Contingencies of Self-Worth and Reactions to Failure in Domains of Self-Worth Contingency: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations with the Rosenberg-self-Esteem Scale (RSE)

Domain	Contingencies of Self-Worth Scale			Reactions to Failure									
				Coping with humor				Putting things into perspective			Distraction		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	r_{RSE}	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	r_{RSE}	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	r_{RSE}
Approval	4.51	1.19	.81	4.04 _a	1.81	.82	.07	5.64 _b	2.18	.16	5.60 _b	2.04	-.05
Appearance	4.74	1.15	.80	4.69 _a	2.15	.86	.21*	5.85 _b	2.26	.26**	4.72 _a	2.34	-.05
Competition	4.87	1.10	.84	4.56 _a	1.81	.84	.05	5.96 _b	2.11	-.03	5.21 _c	1.89	-.18
Competence	5.39	0.87	.77	3.33 _a	2.00	.90	-.01	4.65 _b	2.36	.08	5.31 _c	2.44	-.01
Family Support	5.71	0.97	.82	2.05 _a	1.76	.87	-.04	2.57 _b	2.37	-.07	5.29 _c	2.42	-.03
Virtue	4.75	1.31	.89	3.85 _a	2.38	.92	-.03	4.37 _b	2.51	-.05	4.75 _b	2.41	.10

Note. Means that do not share a subscript are different at $p < .05$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Results

Reactions to threats were relatively consistent across domains: coping with humor $\alpha = .75$, putting things into perspective $\alpha = .59$, and distraction $\alpha = .78$, showing a habitual tendency to cope with failure, but leaving room for the influence of self-worth contingency.

In all contingency domains, coping with humor was the strategy used least, F 's(2, 118) between 6.78 and 49.31, all p 's greater than .001, effect size (η^2) between .10 and .46 (see Table 1). Coping with humor was correlated with the RSE only in the domain *appearance*. The same held true for putting things into perspective. However, using humor to cope with threats to one's appearance was not correlated with the RSE when controlling for putting things into perspective, $r = .11$, $p = .25$, and putting things into perspective remained significantly correlated with the RSE when controlling for coping with humor, $r = .26$, $p < .01$.

To test our main hypotheses, we conducted five-step hierarchical regression analyses to predict coping with humor in the target domain from coping with humor in other domains (Step 1), putting things into perspective and distraction in the target domain (Step 2), RSE (Step 3), the self-worth contingencies of other domains (Step 4), and the self-worth contingency of the target domain (Step 5). A significant ΔR^2 for Step 5 confirms a specific association of self-worth contingency and reacting with humor to a threat above the effect of a general tendency to cope with humor (Step 1), reacting by disengaging (Step 2), global self-esteem (Step 3), and other self-worth contingencies (Step 4). We averaged scale scores of the domains approval and appearance, and competition and competence for the hierarchical regression analyses. The decision was based on the similarity of the domains' contents. The same pattern emerged for all four hierarchical regression analyses; see Table 2.

Coping with humor in other domains was significantly positively associated with coping with humor in the target domain (Step 1). Additionally, within the same domain, putting things into perspective was significantly positively associated with coping with humor (Step 2). The RSE was not associated with coping with humor (Step 4). Finally, confirming our main hypothesis, in all domains, self-worth contingency was significantly negatively associated with coping with humor (Step 5).

Table 2

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Coping With Humor (CH) in a Self-Worth-Contingent (SWC) Domain

Predictor	Approval/Appearance		Competition/Competence		Family Support		Virtue	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1 CH other domains	.30***		.32***		.21***		.21***	
Step 2 Putting into perspective Distraction	.15***	.41*** .03	.23***	.48*** .10	.22***	.47*** .08	.32***	.58*** -.03
Step 3 RSE	.01	.12	.00	-.02	.00	-.03	.00	-.02
Step 4 SWC other domains	.03		.01		.01		.00	
Step 5 SWC target domain	.06***	-.29***	.03**	-.21**	.03*	-.24*	.03*	-.19*
Total adj. R^2	.52		.56		.42		.51	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

In order to test whether global self-esteem moderated the influence of self-worth contingency on coping with humor, we conducted five two-step hierarchical regression analyses to predict the target domain coping with humor from (a) the RSE and the target domain's self-worth contingency (Step 1) and (b) the interaction term computed from the RSE and the target domain's self-worth contingency (both centered by subtracting the mean; Step 2). A significant ΔR^2 for Step 2 would have indicated an RSE moderation effect. No interaction term was significant, $\Delta R^2 < .03$, $F(1, 114) < 2.71$, $p > .10$.

Study 2

Method

Participants and Procedure — Ninety six non-psychology students ($M_{age} = 24.26$ years, $SD = 3.32$, 65% women) were recruited via E-Mail invitation and received 5 Euro compensation for participating. On arrival in a seminar room the participant received a pack of papers containing detailed instructions, the ranking order tasks, questionnaires and a pen. Participants were informed that anonymity is guaranteed, that the session would take about 50 minutes. Nevertheless, participants were told to take the time they needed, thus avoiding time pressure. Seated well apart from each other up to eight participants were tested at once a female investigator being present all the time.

Measures — Participants filled in following self-reports:

- **The ranking order tasks.** Concrete descriptions of setbacks were formulated for the domains approval, appearance, competition/competenceⁱⁱ, family support, and virtue based on a pool of about 550 examples of setbacks in domains of self-worth contingency generated by 93 psychology students; for examples see Table 3. Each ranking order task consisted of five setbacks, one from each domain, and was presented on one page. The setback descriptions were bordered and distributed across the page. The placement of a description on the page from a domain changed with every task. Participants were instructed to rank order the setbacks according to how likely they would react with humor and write the rank next to each setback. An average

likelihood-of-reacting-with-humor rank was computed for each domain by averaging (median) over the ten ranking order tasks. Kendall's coefficients of concordance for each domain across the ten ranking order tasks ranged from .14 (family support) to .31 (virtue).

- **Contingencies of self-worth.** Contingencies of self-worth were assessed with the same scale as in Study 1. For descriptive statistics see [Table 3](#).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Contingencies of Self-Worth and Example Setback Descriptions From the Rank Order Tasks Employed in Study 2

Domain	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	Example
Approval	4.87	1.08	.80	During a break I am talking with other students I know. They plan to meet in the evening, but I am not invited.
Appearance	4.77	1.19	.87	While riding to a party on my bike it starts to rain. When I arrive my hair is ruined and my clothes are dirty. I feel awkward due to the way I look.
Competition/ Competence	4.80/ 5.35	1.01/ 0.83	.76/ .70	Together with fellow students I prepared for an exam. As we receive the results I discover that I did worse than the others.
Family Support	5.63	1.22	.92	I took on a job I think pays well for the time I have to invest. My family does not approve of it.
Virtue	5.16	1.21	.87	In the supermarket the checkout clerk makes a mistake and hands me too much change in return. I don't say anything and keep the money.

Results

As Kendall's coefficients of concordance indicates the ten ranking task were far from redundant, i.e., concrete setbacks from one domain were not identically ranked in each task. The found consistency across tasks is in line with the well documented low consistency across situations in personality psychology (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). Thus, we interpret the average likelihood-of-reacting-with-humor rank as a sound value of the likelihood of reacting with humor in that domain of self-worth contingency.

Like in Study 1 we averaged scale scores for the self-worth contingency domains approval and appearance, and competition and competence. To obtain domain specific values of contingencies of self-worth we conducted regression analyses predicting the self-worth contingencies of one domain from all other remaining domains and saving the unstandardized residuals.

To test our hypothesis we computed Spearman's Rhos between the residual values of self-worth contingency and the average likelihood-of-reacting-with-humor rank for all domains, see [Table 4](#). Confirming our main hypothesis, significant negative associations were found in the domains approval/appearance, competition/competence, and family support. The association in the domain virtue was in the hypothesized direction, but not significant. Associations across domains were all non-significant, apart from the significant positive association between the self-worth contingency family support and using humor to cope with setbacks in the domain approval/appearance.

Table 4

Spearman's Rho Between Rank Order of Coping With Humor and Residual Self-Worth Contingency Values

Residual self-worth contingency values ^a	Rank order of coping with humor in the domain			
	Approval/Appearance	Competition/Competence	Family Support	Virtue
Approval/Appearance	-.20*	.10	.13	.03
Competition/Competence	-.07	-.21*	.10	.17
Family Support	.29**	.02	-.22*	.00
Virtue	-.08	.19	.00	-.15

^aRegression analyses were conducted predicting the self-worth contingency of one domain from all other remaining domains and saving the unstandardized residuals.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

The results of the two presented studies support the hypothesis that people are unlikely to use humor to cope with a setback in a domain that is self-worth contingent (i.e., in which outcomes have an impact on feelings of self-worth). The negative association between self-worth contingency and coping with humor was found in different domains of self-worth contingency and when providing abstract situation descriptions and assessing global ratings of reaction likelihood (Study 1) as well as when providing concrete situation descriptions and assessing ranking of reaction likelihood (Study 2). We believe that the cognitive processes postulated to underlie the self-worth contingency can provide a plausible explanation for the negative association between contingencies of self-worth and coping with humor. Based on the incongruity humor theory (Veatch, 1998), we understand coping with humor to be a specific way of construing a coping situation as being not only aversive but also acceptable at the same time. In the case of self-worth-contingent failure, the goal of self-validation may prevent the construction of an appraisal of acceptance (Dijksterhuis & Aarts, 2010; Shah et al., 2002) and may thus obviate the condition that is necessary for humor to occur.

Furthermore, the association between contingencies of self-worth and coping with humor was not moderated by global self-esteem and unlike the results of previous studies (e.g., Kuiper & Martin, 1993; Martin et al., 1993) coping with humor was not associated with global self-esteem (Study 1). The difference between these studies and our study is that we did not assess coping with humor via a trait measure but averaged humor reactions across different events. It is possible that in previous studies retrospective distortions may have added to the reported associations between global self-esteem and coping with humor in a trait-consistent direction (Robinson & Barrett, 2010).

The association between coping with humor and the disengagement strategy of putting things into perspective when dealing with a self-worth-contingent threat in Study 1 further supports the assumption that coping with humor entails a cognitive shift in construal of the aversive situation (Geisler & Weber, 2010; Kuiper et al., 1995). However, the five-step hierarchical analyses we conducted in which contingencies of self-worth were shown to be associated with coping with humor after controlling for disengagement suggest that there is more to coping with humor than simple disengagement.

In our present research we focused on self-worth contingency as a factor that may impede coping with humor. However, in Study 2 we found a positive association between being self-worth contingent on family support and

using humor to cope with disapproval and unfavorable appearance. Further empirical data will have to show whether this positive association is substantial. Specifically, the question remains to be answered whether the positive association is unique for the contingency with family support and coping with disapproval and unfavorable appearance association or whether it can be found for other domain combinations as well.

Five limitations of our present research need to be acknowledged. First, we did not assess different styles of humor (Kuiper, Grimshaw, Leite, & Kirsh, 2004). It is plausible to expect that more variance between contingencies of self-worth and humor can be explained by differentiating between the use of the adaptive self-enhancing and the maladaptive self-defeating style of humor (Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003). Second, it was not possible to test gender differences in the association between self-worth contingency and coping with humor in the two samples of the present research.ⁱⁱⁱ We do not expect that the cognitive processes postulated to underlie the association to be gender specific. However, reported gender differences in contingencies of self-worth (Crocker et al., 2003), and in styles of humor (Martin et al., 2003) encourage to aim for a gender balanced sample in further research in order to address these two limitations of the present research. Third, in the present research time course was not considered. The question is whether it is more likely to cope with humor when the time span since the setback increases, and more importantly whether the magnitude of the self-worth contingency of the setback interacts with a time course effect. Based on the cognitive processes of goal activation, more precisely on the sustained activation of unfulfilled goal-related cognitions (Förster et al., 2005), we would expect that if the higher order goal of self-validation remains unsatisfied in the mean time then the negative association between self-worth contingency and coping with humor remains, too. Forth, in the present research affect was not considered. Based on the incongruity theory of humor (Veatch, 1998) we consider positive affect (and not necessarily negative affect) to be associated with coping with humor (cf. Geisler & Weber, 2010). Thus, we expect that the experience of positive affect, for example due to being able to laugh at own inadequacies or engage in positive distraction, would moderate the association between self-worth contingency and coping with humor. Finally, we did not directly assess the motive of self-validation and the cognitive processes we postulated would explain why a self-worth contingency would prevent a person from coping with humor. Further research will have to directly investigate these processes with in the context of coping with humor. For example, the postulated association between the high self-worth contingency of a setback and fewer appraisals of acceptability (N) due to goal-driven cognitive activation and goal shielding could be tested by presenting participants with descriptions of setbacks from different domains of self-worth contingency together with the instruction to generate as many different ways as possible to think about the setbacks in a way that would make it acceptable (cf. Weber, Loureiro de Assunção, Martin, Westmeyer, & Geisler, 2014). We would expect a negative association between the self-worth contingency of a domain and the number of generated accepting appraisals for a setback in the same domain.

To conclude, the results of our study support the view that self-worth contingencies (Crocker & Park, 2004; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001) impede the use of humor in coping with a setback. This may be due to goal-related cognitive processes (Dijksterhuis & Aarts, 2010; Förster et al., 2005; Shah et al., 2002).

Notes

- i) We did not include the self-worth contingency God's Love.
- ii) It was not possible to separate examples of concrete setbacks from the domains competition and competence from each other in an objective way. That is why one concrete setback represents the competition and competence domain.
- iii) In both studies patterns of findings for the female participants were the same as reported for all participants.

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Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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