



HUMOR: NOT JUST A LAUGHING MATTER

Class 4: Influence of
Humor on Society

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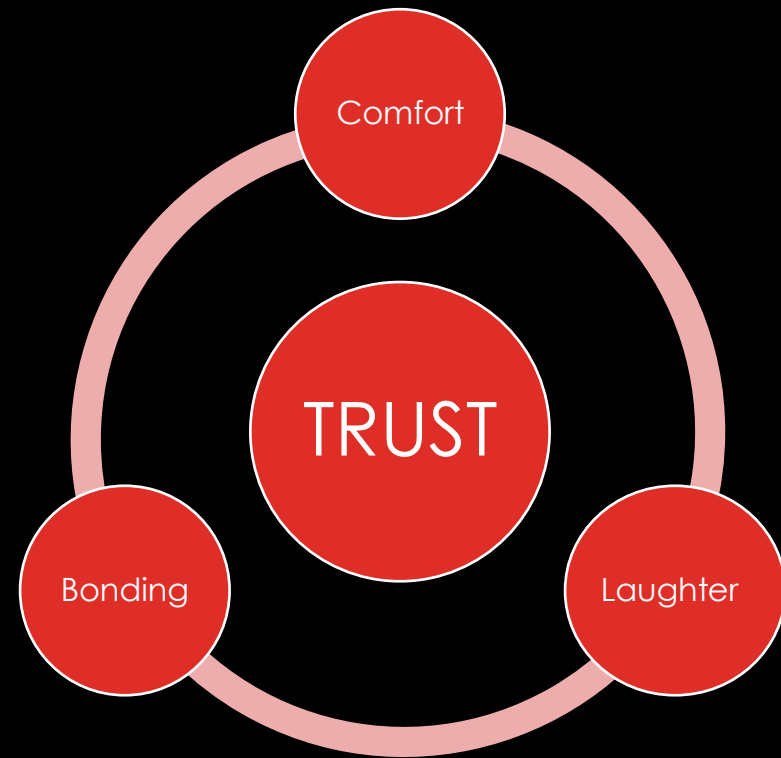
CLASS 4 OBJECTIVES

- List 2 societal benefits of humor.
- Discuss why are men perceived as more humorous?
- Describe an example of how humor can influence societal change.
- Share an example of how humor was used to cope with the pandemic.



PURPOSE OF LAUGHTER

- Indicates trust in one's companions:
John Morreall, Philosopher
- Making and strengthening human connections: Mahadev Apte, Cultural Anthropologist
- Dominant individuals use humor more than their subordinates; controls behavior
- We only laugh with those we trust



SOCIAL BENEFITS OF HUMOR/LAUGHTER

- ✓ Attracts others to us
- ✓ Strengthens relationships
- ✓ Enhances teamwork
- ✓ Promotes group bonding
- ✓ Helps defuse conflict
- ✓ Tool for social change



SOCIAL NATURE OF LAUGHTER

- Laughter was 30 X more frequent in social vs solitary situations (1200 observed people in various situations)
 - Solitary situations produced smiling or talking to self
 - Laughter as a signal we send to others; virtually disappears when we lack an audience (Robert Provine)
- Difficult to control consciously
- Social settings of laughter:
 - Playfulness, being in a group, positive emotional tone
 - “Wherever you find [laughter], it’s associated with interactions... you’re laughing to show people you understand them, that you agree with them, that you’re part of the same group as them.” award-winning filmmaker, novelist, and playwright, Anthony McCarten

GENDER DIFFERENCES

- Females laugh more! In cross-gender conversations, females laughed 126% more than males (Provine)
- Males tend to be more laugh-getting
 - Instigators of humor across cultures, which begins in early childhood
 - More male comedians
 - Both men and women laugh more at men than at women
 - Men preferred a woman that would appreciate their humor over a woman that would make them laugh (Bressler, Martin, and Balshine (2006)
- Women desire men who make them laugh; men desire women who laugh (Grammer & Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1996)
 - The laughter of the female, not the male, is the critical index of a healthy relationship
- Sense of humor is found to be a more desirable trait in a mate for women choosing a mate (Buss, 1988, Feingold, 1992, Goodwin, 1990, Lippa, 2007, Sprecher and Regan, 2002, Todosijević et al., 2003, Toro-Morn and Sprecher, 2003)

EXAMINING GENDER DIFFERENCES

WOMEN

- Tend to share humorous stories and take a narrative approach
- While women tend to use puns, self-deprecating humor and wordplay
- Comics such as Sarah Silverman and Woody Allen cross over the gender lines a great deal
- In mixed company women actually teased more than men, and directed their teasing toward the men.

Men

- Men more commonly use one-liners and engage in slapstick.
- Men are more inclined to use physical and active humor
- More likely to tease and try to one-up in their use of humor with other men
- Men are more likely to elicit laughter from someone else than laugh themselves

SEX DIFFERENCES IN HUMOR PRODUCTION ABILITY: A META-ANALYSIS

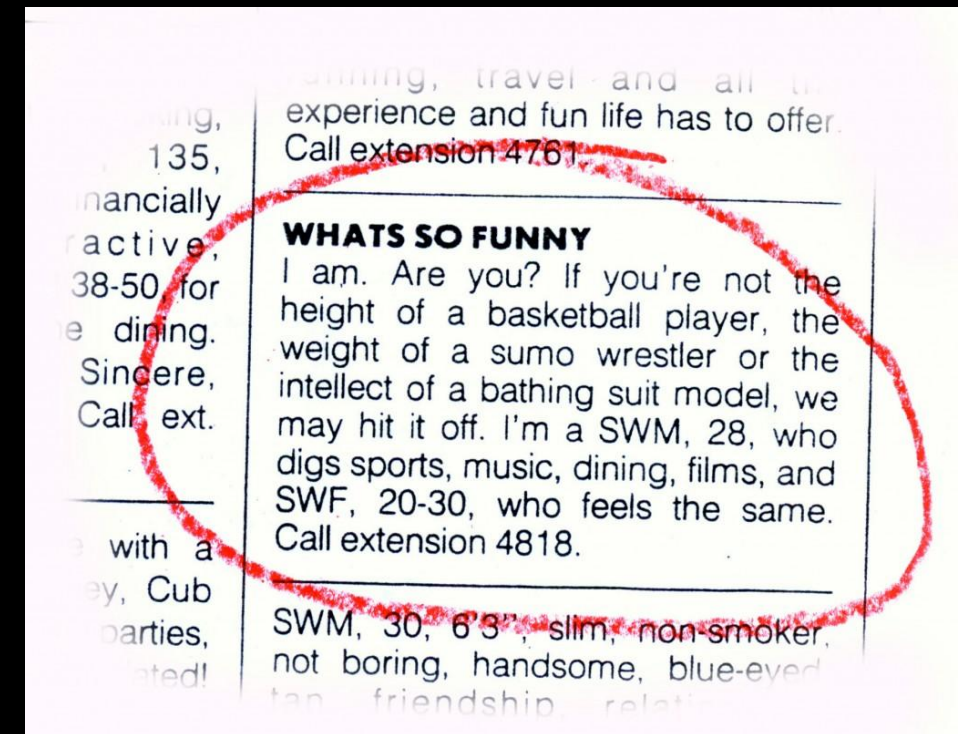
- Humor production ability (HPA)—a cognitive trait defined as the ability to produce funny remarks, create funny ideas, and make others laugh
- Social stereotypes about sex differences in humor—“women are not funny”—are culturally pervasive
- In sexually reproducing species, the sex that bears the higher costs of reproduction is the choosier one, in most cases the females.
- Various cognitive capacities, such as language, arts, sports, and humor, evolved through mutual mate choice to advertise mate quality
- Humor is hypothesized to be one such fitness indicator, and HPA is positively correlated with various intelligence measures, most strongly with verbal aptitude
 - Women are choosier than men, men will be more motivated to advertise HPA in an effort to attract women, while women will put more effort in selecting mates based on men's ability to produce and showcase high levels of HPA

- Humor production ability is a distinct cognitive ability that is largely uncorrelated with appreciation and enjoyment of humor.
- Measurement of humor creation ability typically consists of four steps, two for the creation of the humor, and two for the evaluation of the humor.

- Results:
 - On average, men have higher humor production ability than women. 63% of men were funnier than the average woman
 - Effect is small to moderate.
 - Humor was rated by independent judges assessing the humor produced by both sexes.
 - Difference may reflect both evolutionary and environmental influences.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

- Men want a humor appreciator, while women want a humor producer.
- Personal ads in newspapers and online dating sites, where people have low incentive to lie about their true preferences, show that women seek a mate who portrays humor ability twice as much as men do, and that men are more likely to declare how funny they are, or attempt humor, compared to women (Smith et al., 1990, Wilbur and Campbell, 2011)
- Individuals who were rated high for HPA reported higher mating success as measured by number of sexual partners, age of first intercourse, and more sexual encounters, compared to individuals with low HPA (results were true for both sexes) (Greengross & Miller, 2011).
- However, women who have humorous partners did report having more and stronger vaginal orgasms, compared to women who have less funny partners, while men's sexual satisfaction was not related to women's HPA (Gallup, Ampel, Wedberg, & Pogosjan, 2014).



THE ROLE OF NEUROCHEMISTRY

- When rating cartoons as funny on a scale from 1 to 10, women's brains show more activity in the region of the brain responsible for producing words. They also show increased activity in the dopamine or reward center of the brain.
- For women, the funnier the joke, the more the activity.
- For men, activation remained moderate for all jokes.
- The interpretation is that women listen with more openness and are thus more pleased.
- Men, the joke makers, may carry more expectations and thus experience less delight as the recipients of humor.

ROLE OF OXYTOCIN

- Oxytocin and emotional processing:
 - Research indicates that oxytocin can influence the amygdala, a brain region involved in processing emotional responses.
- Oxytocin and social bonding:
 - Oxytocin plays a key role in parent-infant bonding and attachment formation. Studies have found that oxytocin increases functional connectivity between the amygdala and other brain regions involved in emotional processing, suggesting a link between oxytocin and the regulation of emotions during social interactions.



Photo by Nathan Dumlao
on Unsplash

DIFFERENCES IN CREATING & PERCEIVING HUMOR

- Global stereotype: men are funnier
- Both men and women are more likely to attribute funny captions to male writers, and non-funny cartoons to women
- Societal expectations to fit into sex-specific roles put pressure on both men and women to acquire the skills and adopt behaviors that will conform to their role requirements
- For many years women tended to be the objects of jokes, often disparaging and sexist in nature, but rarely the subject producing the humor
- Women were prevented from using humor in the public sphere, not allowed to tell jokes and perform comedy routines, and confined to tell jokes only in private,
- Expectations transfer into behavior are often referred to as cultural scripts (men expected to be aggressor in courtship)

STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS

- Sharing laughter also adds joy, vitality, and resilience
- Powerful and effective way to heal resentments, disagreements, and hurts
- Laughter unites people during difficult times
- Triggers a positive feelings and fostering emotional connection (release of oxytocin)
- Laughter bonds acts as a strong buffer against stress, disagreements, and disappointment
 - Helps you to be more spontaneous
 - Laughter helps you forget resentments, judgments, criticisms, and doubts.
 - Release inhibitions
 - Express your true feelings



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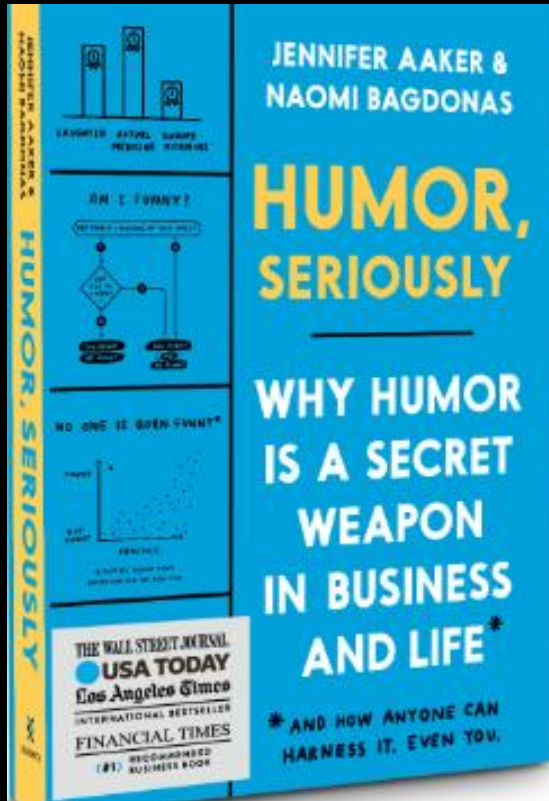
IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIP HUMOR

- Relationship develops and humor becomes more about soothing each other and less about winning each other over, the typical gender roles in humor tend to reverse
- It appears that male humor is better designed to win attention and affection, while female humor is better designed to maintain them.
- Nine out of ten couples consider humor as an important part of their relationship.
- Compared to partners in dysfunctional relationships, those in strong ones appreciate their partner's humor more.
- Couples together for more than 45 years claim that laughing is crucial for marital success.

PROFESSIONAL COMICS

- In a system where the male opinion is highly valued, a male comedian simply has to be funny to men, which is likely to be easier than for a female comedian to be funny to men. Which might suggest that part of the reason you find male comedians funnier is because you are male.
- Men spend time and energy learning to be funny
- A lot of female comedians are respected because their jokes are complex, witty, and often more niche; it's as though society is telling women, "Okay, you're finally allowed to be funny, but only in the way that you're smart and therefore funny, because there's no way you're actually just naturally funny"
- Pressure on women to craft more intricate comedy

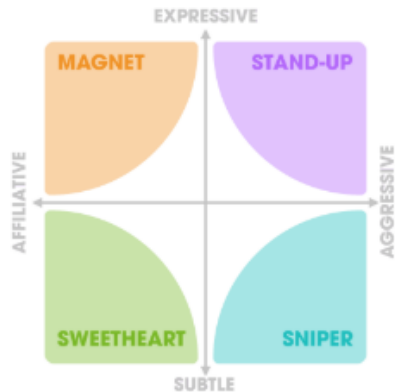
HUMOR TO ENHANCE TEAMWORK



- Improv comedy can teach us to be in the moment, to listen actively, to build on the ideas of others, develop a sense of resilience and to be comfortable with taking risks
- Use humor to build relationships with stakeholders: “please don’t attribute malice to what can be explained by my ignorance”; “apology tour”
- Use humor to enhance creativity and innovation: people are in a positive mode, they are more likely to think creatively and generate new ideas (decrease in stress hormones)
- Humor to communicate: “toilet problem”; problem that requires intense research
- Provide opportunities to play and laugh together
- “One good laugh — or better still, a workplace that encourages levity — builds cohesion.” —Brad Bitterly and Alison Wood Brooks

Humor Typology Quiz

Not everyone is funny in the same way. Over the past few years, we've run a series of studies to tease apart individual differences in both what people tend to joke about, and how people most naturally deliver their humor: content and delivery. Those studies have yielded four primary humor styles: **the Stand-up**, **the Sweetheart**, **the Magnet**, and **the Sniper**.



When it comes to the content of someone's humor, we've found that it ranges from affiliative (wholesome, uplifting humor) to aggressive (humor that's no-holds-barred and a few shades darker). Meanwhile, someone's humor delivery can range from expressive (spirited, spontaneous, spotlight-seeking) to subtle (understated, premeditated, and full of nuance).

[HTTPS://QUIZ.HUMORSE RIOUSLY.COM/](https://quiz.humorseriously.com/)

This Humor Typology Quiz is meant to help you identify and understand your natural humor style, to allow you to wield it with precision and presence. It takes most people about 3-4 minutes to complete and all answers are confidential. To learn more about the different humor styles and using humor as your secret superpower in work and life, check out our book, *Humor, Seriously*.

BUILDING TEAM BONDS

- Use humor to boost the morale, enthusiasm, and loyalty of employees, by making work more enjoyable, meaningful, or rewarding
- Humor can have different effects on team outcomes depending on its tone, intention, and target
 - Be authentic and natural
 - Be positive and respectful
 - Be adaptive and flexible
 - Be strategic and purposeful
 - Be balanced and moderate
- Provide opportunities to play



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HUMOR TO OVERCOME CONFLICT

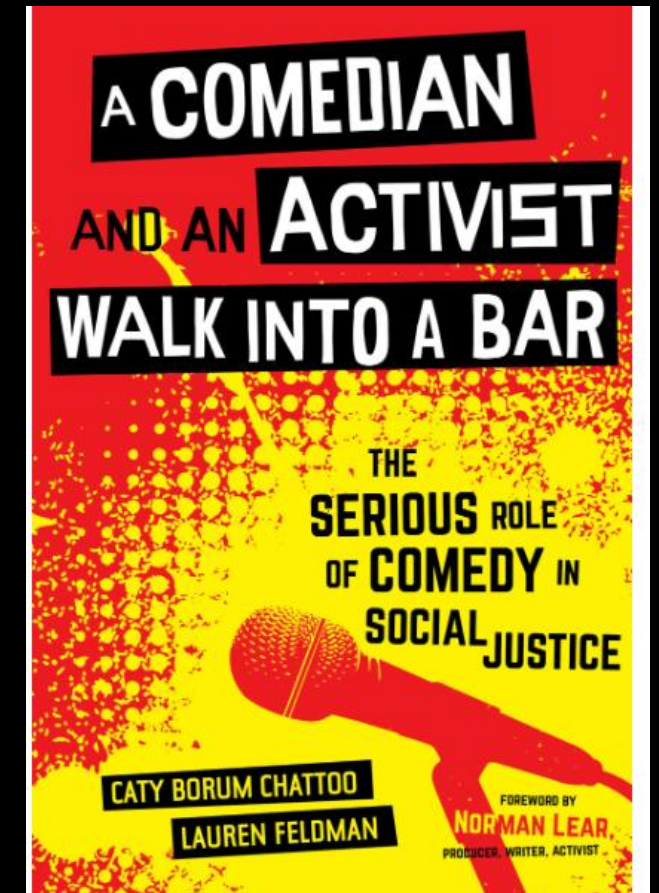


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- Diffuse tension: A well-timed joke can ease a tense situation and help you resolve disagreements; interrupt the power struggle
- Overcome problems and setbacks: key to resilience; helps you take hardships in stride, weather disappointment, and bounce back from adversity and loss
- Put things into perspective: help you reframe problems that might otherwise seem overwhelming and damage a relationship; be more spontaneous; be less defensive
- Humor should be equally fun and enjoyable for everyone involved

CAN HUMOR INFLUENCE SOCIAL CHANGE?

- Media and technological disruption have created the ideal conditions for boundary-pushing socially critical, comedy thrives in the entertainment marketplace
- Plays a strategic role in efforts to call attention to global poverty, climate change, immigration, racial justice and sexual assault.
- Comedy pulls people in and creates a positive emotional connection, which can, in turn, inspire engagement and action
 - Draws attention
 - Disarms audiences
 - Lowers resistance to persuasion
 - Breaks down social barriers
 - Stimulates sharing and discussion



COMEDY AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

- *Rise* is an organization that advocates for civil rights protections for sexual assault survivors started by Amanda Nguyen, raped while a student at Harvard
 - In 2016, Nguyen partnered with Funny or Die to create a sketch comedy video that exposed the absurdity of existing sexual assault laws.
 - Promoted a new bill in the Senate called the “Sexual Assault Survivors’ Bill of Rights Act.”
 - Passed unanimously at the federal level and was signed into law by President Obama in October 2016
 - 3rd video in 2018 to launch their international work with the United Nations and respond to the #MeToo movement.



THE ROLE OF HUMOR IN TOUGH TIMES

- Karyn Buxman's TEDx Talk where she suggests it's "more important to 'see' funny than it is to 'be' funny." And to do that you have to intentionally raise your awareness and start looking for humor, you'll see funny things everywhere. And by being able to spot the funny (instead of constantly trying to be the funny) you're opening your mind to opportunities and other viewpoints.
- Covid 19: More than that, memes and humor are giving us the ability to bond as a community no matter where in the world we are because we're all in this together (this is the first of two times I will ever say those words as it relates to the pandemic). Although we are all experiencing the pandemic slightly differently, we all share this commonality, and thus we are all in on the joke.

COVID MEMES

- Comedy brings people together by highlighting our common experiences
- Meme: representation of a phenomenon or concept that is repeatedly imitated and mutated ad infinitum.
- Memes often spread via social media
- 21st century is driven by a “participatory culture,” one in which audiences are no longer being fed pop culture, but arguably creating it themselves.
- Shaming actions (our own and others’), relating, camaraderie, empathy, pointing out the obvious, etc. – and no matter their purpose, they all serve to bring about laughter.
- Shareability is one of the cornerstones of memehood.

<https://copyhackers.com/2020/06/covid-memes/>





