

Passage 1. *The authors McGee-Cooper, Trammell and Looper write about the cost of humour.*

- 1 You may have enjoyed a good laugh at similar jokes created at the expense of certain groups. It usually feels good to chuckle and to feel 'in on' the joke. Our joking at someone else's expense even if they are not present sends a strong message defining 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. If we so happen to be a member of the group being targeted, such humour can undermine our sense of self-worth, commitment to the organisation, and performance. 5
- 2 This subtle art of intimidation and one-upmanship is prevalent in corporate America and our society at large. Not too long ago, our company hired some new marketing executives to position the company for greater growth. A schism soon developed between the new hires and the 'old timers' in the accounting department. The finance executives balked at the money that was being spent on marketing campaigns without regard to budget limits and battled with the 'outsiders' in meetings. In response, the marketing people began to refer to the accountants as 'DOAPs' — dumb old accounting people. After a while, they began to discredit any input that came from a DOAP. To really slam a person, they would say, 'You are beginning to sound like a DOAP!' and everyone would have a good laugh. While all comedy has an overt meaning, much of it also delivers a hidden, negative message, one we may not consciously recognise or realise we are sending. 10 15
- 3 What are the roots of negative humour? Some might argue that they lie in American-style individualism, which pits one person against the other in a race to be the best, first, fastest, or smartest. Part of the 'winning' strategy is to intimidate, put down, or best others by discounting them and their position, opinion, or performance. When we 'zing' a group of people based on race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, weight, or other characteristics, we feel superior to them. When others laugh at our 'zingers', we feel affirmed and justified. 20
- 4 What is the result of this tactic? When we are the targets, we may pay the price in lowered self-esteem, self-doubt, anxiety, and loss of energy. It is hard to stay motivated at work when you begin to question your credibility within the organisation. Fear weakens the immune system, which increases illnesses and absenteeism. In many instances, the offended person falls into the double bind of being insulted and then told not to feel insulted. In fact, the retort 'Can't you take a joke?' implies that you are overly sensitive. This puts the labeller in control and the labelled as unworthy of a valid complaint. 25
- 5 When we are not the intended victim of a mean-spirited jibe but rather someone on the sidelines listening and observing, we may feel that our personal integrity has been eroded. If we laugh at negative humour, we are tacitly agreeing with the joke teller and buying in to his or her point of view. If we do not laugh, we risk being excluded or the butt of the next joke. We may be chided, 'Loosen up' or perhaps 'Where is your sense of humour?' But although it may seem like harmless fun, negative humour can be emotional bullying or verbal abuse in its most vicious form — even if we are not the targets. Over time, it can strip us of our sensitivity, empathy, and compassion. It is easy to be a critic; it does not take much talent to find fault with others. 30 35
- 6 To be playful and humorous within the context of responsible dialogue takes great skill, energy, intelligence, and insight. Thoughtful, respectful people question the thinking of others in ways that do not discount them, their motives, or their ability to think, but rather focus on the assumptions, logic, or basis for their statements. With that, humour can be the foundation of a healthy and positive environment. 40

Passage 2. *O'Hara argues that comedy is our greatest tool for progressive change.*

- 1 Comedy is more than just a pleasant way to pass an evening, humour more than something to amuse. They are interwoven into the fabric of our everyday existence. Whether you are sharing an amusing story down the pub, making a self-deprecating joke after someone pays you a compliment or telling a dark joke at a funeral, laughter is expected and a lubricant in social settings. Humour is everywhere. But what is it for? Can humour, as comedy, change how we feel, what we think or even what we do? 5
- 2 Humour is a form of psychological processing, a coping mechanism that helps people to deal with complex and contradictory messages — a response to conflict and confusion in the brain. This, in part, is why we laugh in response to dark, confusing or tragic events that, on the face of it, should not be funny at all. Why, for example, would jokes circulate after 9/11 if we were not collectively grasping for ways to parse how unsettling and disruptive it was? Humour that is in bad taste or cruelly targeted at particular groups may generate conflict, but perhaps, humour is our way of working through difficult subjects or feelings. There is evidence that some types of comedy — including sophisticated satire, which is growing in popularity — perform a potent social function, from breaking taboos to holding those in power to account. 10
- 3 For some comedians, comedy is not just about getting laughs — it is about changing what we think and maybe even what we do. Josie Long, a social justice activist and a comedian, consciously puts social and political topics at the heart of her act. She believes that comedians have a role to play in articulating and challenging some of the most pressing issues of the day, filtering the political realities of contemporary Britain — especially what she sees as those afflicted by overt injustices from the government — through humour. ‘Politics can leave you beleaguered, plagued, miserable,’ she says. ‘It is that maxim where they say, “Satire is to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.”’ That is why humour is important. It is useful for other people in the way it actively provides a counterbalance to bigotry and prejudice, as well as understanding the types of humour that reinforce negative stereotypes. ‘I want to make sure I’m punching up, not punching down,’ she adds. 15 20
- 4 Very often what comedians can do is use logic to make comical sense of painful things. By using logic as a framing mechanism to tell jokes, complicated emotions and arguments can be articulated when they are otherwise offensive. This process necessarily involves more than just an expression of the individual performer’s viewpoint. Responding with laughter can foster a sense of shared ideals, just as how the refusal to laugh is a form of protest. When it comes to issues like social justice, humour can be a social corrective which has been seen in African American comedy, religious humour, and feminist humour. It validates shared experiences and gets people to think more flexibly to reframe situations. 25 30
- 5 When comedy is linked to an established ‘serious’ subject, like politics, or to negativity, people think there is a value to it. Just because it is fun it does not necessarily mean it is insignificant, and humour may be the way of finally getting at what is special about the human condition.

Adapted from <https://qz.com/765238/in-the-21st-century-comedy-is-our-greatest-tool-for-progressive-change/>

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