

# Self-initiated humour protocols

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## Humour Theories

The self-initiated humour protocols reflect the following four families of humour:

1. The superiority theory: initially due to Plato and Hobbes: we laugh with sudden glory when we ridicule, mock or look down on someone, or simply when we see ourselves as superior to someone.
2. The incongruity theory: initially due to Kant and Schopenhauer: we laugh when something non-serious violates our common belief, e.g., when the punchline of a joke violates our expectation built earlier in the joke.
3. The perspective theory: A more contemporary rationale for laughter due to Charlie Chaplin, a pioneer in modern comedy: "Life is a tragedy when seen in close-up, but a comedy in long-shot." He provides a method of how this is accomplished by which he introduced the concept of play in laughter: "To truly laugh, you must be able to take your pain, and play with it!".
4. The evolutionary or playful theory: laughter is developed as a play signal in higher primates in their mock fights to indicate non-aggressive intent.

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## Protocols

The set of exercises for self-initiated humour are enumerated below. The first two are mental and muscular exercises to prepare our body to be in a playful mode. The rest provide context and trigger for non-hostile Duchenne laughter. These exercises are to be practiced initially on our own rather than with others. If in our laughter we sense any contempt against ourselves or others, we need to practice neutralising the contempt and converting it into surprise or simple amusement and thus to non-hostile laughter. This would enable us to have health benefits from our laughter.

### (i) PLAYFUL MIND

Our sub-optimal habits can cause inflexibility and rigidity in our mind, which is a potential barrier against a spontaneous and playful attitude in life, a crucial condition for being humorous. In this exercise, using the evolutionary theory (4), we practice being more flexible and playful about our beliefs and thoughts. For example, if we firmly follow a political, ideological, religious, or cultural orientation, we may investigate and try to comprehend some of the counter positions to it. We can also exaggerate some of our beliefs to the extent that they sound absurd and thus funny. This does not mean that we necessarily abandon our position but it allows our mind to be a platform for a fluid, constructive and playful discussion between seemingly opposite or different perspectives. We also try to interpret events in the outside world playfully by rising above the fray in binary and opposing viewpoints for example in political debates as in the UK's House of Commons.

### (ii) PLAYFUL FACE

Rigidity in thoughts and beliefs can also create rigidity in body and facial muscles specifically muscles round the mouth and eyes. In this exercise, in line with (4), we try to become playful and, to this end, loosen up muscles around mouth and eyes by moving them around and by singing our favourite songs to simulate and encourage spontaneity. Duchenne laughter is characterised by loose and half-open mouth and contracting muscles around the eyes, which this exercise helps to create.

### (iii) SELF-GLORY

In this exercise, we learn to laugh on our own over very simple things like our daily routine. On completing any mundane task, such as dish washing or shopping which we may even find boring, give yourself a smile/laugh as a victory gesture to congratulate yourself. In line with the incongruity theory of laughter, we can see a priori, before actually exercising this protocol, why it is actually funny: it violates our expectation as one does not congratulate oneself for such routine

and mundane tasks. This a priori humour starts off the protocol once we spontaneously remember to switch to the playful mode. In a sense, we are laughing at the protocol itself. On the other hand, a posteriori after the act of smile and laughter, we can laugh at ourselves because, in line with the superiority theory (1), we have excelled our own former self: previously we completed this task without any accompanying positive affect but now we have done it with a joyful feeling and sudden glory.

#### **(iv) INCONGRUOUS WORLD**

Any discordance, incompatibility or incongruity as well as anything perceived as unusual or extreme in the world that is not immediately threatening can be the context and trigger for Duchenne laughter. The same is true for any change in the outside world, e.g., behaviour of someone or course of events, that we perceive as significant. In this exercise, we practice being cognisant of any contrast, incongruity, inconsistency, or discrepancy in the world and use them, by the incongruity theory (2), as an underlying reason to smile or laugh. As we learn to laugh at contrasts that we recognise and discover in this way, the superiority theory (1) gives us ground for further laughing as we have indeed surpassed our usual and less humorous attitude in life.

#### **(v) INCONGRUOUS SELF**

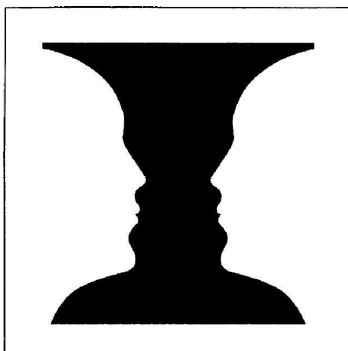
In this exercise the context for humour is any incongruity in our own life, mind and behaviour, such as our own contradictions, conflicts, change of attitudes, thoughts, assumptions, expectations. Every individual is full of such inconsistencies. We practice being cognisant of any contrast, incongruity or discrepancy in our own world and use them, by the incongruity theory (2), as an underlying reason to smile or laugh. Again, as we laugh at such disparities that we recognise and discover in this way, the superiority theory (1) gives us ground for further laughing as we have indeed surpassed our usual and less humorous attitude in life.

#### **(vi) SELF/WORLD INCONGRUITY**

In this exercise the context for humour is the incongruity between the hard reality of the external world and our personal expectations. A common example is the recognition of any sharp or wide difference between our expectation of someone or something and the reality of the matter as it stands or as it unfolds. In this exercise, we practice being cognisant of any contrast between reality and our expectation and use it, by the incongruity theory (2), as an underlying reason to smile or laugh. Once again, as we learn to laugh at contrasts between reality and our expectation, the superiority theory gives us ground for further laughing as we have indeed surpassed our usual and less humorous attitude in life.

#### **(vii) CONTRASTING VIEWS**

In this exercise, we stare at the gestalt vase below until our perception changes and we see two white faces looking at each other. In line with the incongruity theory (2) and the evolutionary theory (4), we smile or laugh when this change of perception takes place, confirming that we can amusingly and laughingly switch our interpretation even if the object of our view remains the same. Similarly, we stare at the two white faces until our perception changes and we perceive the gestalt vase, at which point we smile or laugh.



#### **(viii) OUR OWN LAUGHTER BRAND**

In this exercise, in line with evolutionary theory (4), we practice playfully creating our own form of laughter which will have our own signature. Moreover, we design our brand in such a way that it uses a minimum amount of our energy so that it can be used for a long period of time or employed for many times repeatedly. With muscles around the mouth loosened and mouth open, we repeat one of the following repetitions phrases (using a vowel like “a”, “e”, “o”) while turning it into laughter as you look into a mirror:

ah, ah, ah, ah, ...  
eh, eh, eh, eh, ...  
oh, oh, oh, oh, ...  
ih, ih, ih, ih, ...  
uh, uh, uh, uh, .....

This exercise is a priori funny and amusing by the incongruity theory (2) as we do not expect ourselves to create a new form of laughter. Having practised the exercise, we can laugh by the superiority theory (1). Once we habituate ourselves with our own new form of laughter, we are encouraged to find humour in new contexts and respond to it with this self-created form of laughter.

#### **(ix) FEIGNING LAUGHTER**

We swim or run as a physical exercise not to get from one place to another, but because these exercises keep us physically healthy. Similarly, to keep our spirits high, we can learn to laugh as a mental exercise without any accompanying humour. It is known that feigning Duchenne laughter, as practiced in laughter yoga, brings similar physiological benefits as genuine humour-based Duchenne laughter. In self-initiated humour laughter, however, we consider feigning Duchenne laughter as funny in itself since, by the incongruity theory of laughter (2), we do not expect anyone to systematically fake laughter. The exercise is also a posteriori funny by the superiority theory.

#### **(x) SELF-LAUGHTER**

this exercise, in line with the evolutionary theory (4), we learn to become playful and laugh at our own everyday errors, lapses, blunders, flaws, glitches, miscalculations, mismanagements and other faults. While at first, we may feel upset about these minor issues, we practice to interpret them differently and try to quickly laugh them off by the incongruity theory (2), since we do not expect these faults to occur, as well as the playful theory (4). This exercise too is a posteriori funny by the superiority theory.

#### **(xi) LAUGHING AT MISFORTUNES AND DISTURBING CIRCUMSTANCES**

In this exercise, which has a longer description than the previous ones, we learn to laugh at our misfortunes, tragedies, setbacks, rejections, failures and disasters as well as at disturbing events and circumstances in line with (3). The objective is to be able to turn negative emotions like sadness, anger, fear and disgust to laughter. We start by trying to reinterpret these events and circumstances and identify any positive effect they had in our lives. At the very least we managed to survive them and since “What does not kill you makes you stronger” (Nietzsche), they may have resulted in some gain for us. By looking at them from a different cognitive perspective, we would prepare the ground for exercising this protocol.

Next, we consider the following shocking paragraph in Nietzsche’s writings: “To those human beings who are of any concern to me I wish suffering, desolation, sickness, ill-treatment, indignities—I wish that they should not remain unfamiliar with profound self-contempt, the torture of self-mistrust, the wretchedness of the vanquished: I have no pity for them, because I wish them the only thing that can prove today whether one is worth anything or not—that one endures.”

This paragraph makes sense in combination with his famous saying: “What does not kill you makes you stronger.” However, Nietzsche’s wish above is also very funny and a harmless violation of our deep-rooted beliefs by the incongruity theory (2) since we do not usually wish a friend misfortune.

Thus, we can use the above shocking quote as a way of playing with our misfortunes in the way suggested by Chaplin.

Therefore, in this exercise, we consider a disturbing event or circumstance that took place in the distant past that we have struggled with for a long time, and despite its painfulness we try to see a positive impact it has had on us. We recite the shocking quote above, we remember our misfortune and begin to laugh out loud when we finish the sentence: “To those human beings who are of any concern to me I wish suffering...”, and then continue to laugh as we recite the rest of the quote.

After repeating such exercises, once we have experienced the benefit of laughing at distant problems, we can gradually begin to laugh at more recent disturbing events or circumstances.

#### **(xii) LAUGHING AT LONG-TERM SUFFERING**

The final exercise aims to use laughter to come to terms with and accept not just isolated misfortunes and disturbing events and circumstances in life, but also any long-standing pattern of suffering.

As in the previous exercise, we first try to identify what positive result may have come out of this long term difficulty which would provide us a new perspective for interpreting the problem. Then, we use another well-known quote by Nietzsche. “My formula for greatness in a human being is amor fati [Latin for: love of fate]: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it—all idealism is mendacious in the face of what is necessary—but love it”.

In today’s world, this statement violates our usual beliefs and is therefore funny by the incongruity theory (2) as it encourages us not just to bear (as we are normally advised to do by friends and experts) but to love all that has happened to us including all our suffering. Again, this makes sense with Nietzsche’s motto: “What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.” It is also in line with Chaplin’s suggestion (3) if the suffering took place in the past.

Therefore, in this exercise, we recite the above quote and when we reach to the final words “but love it”, we laugh out loud while we are thinking of our suffering.