

Scientific research on sense of humour sheds light on psychological profiles

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Psychology :: Scientific research on sense of humour sheds light on psychological profiles

The researcher analysed more than 1,500 people between the ages of 18 and 80 and a similar number of men and women. The study concludes that there are no universally good jokes for both women and men, and points out that women have changed their humour preferences.

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Is it possible to scientifically measure someone's sense of humour? Are there universal or bad jokes that make people laugh no matter their gender, profession or background? These are some of the questions answered by the doctoral thesis *Sense of humour: building the appreciation of humour scale*, carried out by Hugo Carretero Dios, researcher in the department of Social Psychology and Methodology of Behavioural Science at the University of Granada (Universidad de Granada).

This study, directed by researchers Cristino Pérez Meléndez and Gualberto Buela Casa, is the first work in Spain stemming from Psychology aimed at measuring people's sense of humour. Carretero Dios analysed more than 1,500 people between the ages of 18 and 80 and a similar number of men and women.

This study focused on the following types of humour: sexual humour, black humour, humour degrading to men, humour degrading to women, simple humour and complex humour. The study provided the first scientifically approved evaluation instrument in Spain to measure

humour appreciation. Moreover, it helped to improve other instruments used in countries.

Generational change

Carretero Dios observed a generational change in the women's preferences to the types of humour. "There has been change in women's values and roles in our society," Carretero Dios. "In people over 45-50, we observed that both men and women laugh at jokes degrading to women than those degrading to men". At the same time, both men and women showed more rejection to jokes degrading to men.

However, among the participants between 18-25 years old, the trend was different and men and women had different reactions. Men laugh more at jokes degrading to women and those degrading to men. By contrast, women laugh more at jokes degrading to men and those degrading to women. Indeed, this trend is more pronounced in women.

Could these findings show a change in educational values or even a new pattern in the role played by women? According to Carretero Dios, "humour is useful to study the predominant values of a specific society, and is also a powerful instrument to show cultural trends (actions, etc). We only need to remember the conflict caused by the Mohammed cartoon year, in which humour clashed with religion."

There is no 'universal humour'

One of the conclusions of this study was that the different personalities of people differentiate specific humour preferences. "Consequently, there are no universally good jokes — humour depends on the person," says Carretero Dios.

Contrary to what we would expect, "a particular person's momentary state of mind in a humorous situation, such as on hearing a joke, does not imply that the person finds that particular situation funny," explains Carretero Dios. A person's taste in humour "is rather an intellectual or aesthetic question, emotion or state of mind being more related to physiological and behavioural factors of sense of humour than an opinion of what we think is funny."

Humour in hospitals

Carretero Dios is the president of the Spanish Cultural Association "Titiritas: Humour and Health" (*Titiritas*: humour and health), which works with hospitals and aims at bringing humour to these centres to make this context more human and see the influence of this humour on different parameters. This association has been awarded best non-profit youth organisation in the Andalusian region by the city of Granada. Moreover, it receives funding from the Culture of the Andalusian Institute of Youth. Recently, this association participated in a study that analysed the impact of humour on the behaviour of psychiatric patients in an acute hospital. This study was chosen by the American association HumorLab as one of the four most important studies on an international level on sense of humour in 2006.

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