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Psychological Profiles Examined In Scientific Research On Sense Of Humor

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Is it possible to scientifically measure someone's sense of humour? Are there universally good or bad jokes that make people laugh no matter their gender, profession or cultural background" These are some of the questions answered by the doctoral thesis Sentido del humor: construccion de la escala de apreciacion del humor (Sense of humour: building of 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 Guadalupe Buela Casal, is the first work in Spain stemming from Psychology aimed at measuring people's sense of humour to analyse the psychological variables related to 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 evaluate humour appreciation. Moreover, it helped to improve other instruments used in other countries.

Generational change

Carretero Dios observed a generational change in the women's preferences to the different types of humour. "There has been change in women's values and roles in our society," says Carretero Dios. "In people over 45-50, we observed that both men and women laughed more 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 reject those degrading to men. By contrast, women laugh more at jokes degrading to men and reject 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 roles 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 (beliefs, actions, etc). We only need to remember the conflict caused by the Mohammed cartoons last 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 help to differentiate specific humour preferences. "Consequently, there are no universally good or bad 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 humourous 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: Humor y Salud" (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 in 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 Area of 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 unit. 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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The results of this thesis were recently presented at the 'International Humour Conference', sponsored and organised by the International Society of Humor Studies, the world's leading scientific association on humour. The results were also published in prestigious journals such as the *International Journal of Humor Research* (the most important scientific journal in the world on the study of sense of humour), *Psicothema* and *Análisis y Modificación de Conducta*.

Reference:
Prof. Hugo Carretero Dios. Department of Social Psychology and Methodology of Behavioural Science, University of Granada.

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