



DIALOGUES



A NEWSLETTER FROM CONVERSATIONS-
CENTRE FOR POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

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HUMOUR AND MENTAL HEALTH

Humour can play an important role in promoting mental health and wellbeing. Laughter and humour have been shown to reduce stress and anxiety, boost mood, and even improve physical health. Humour can help us to cope with difficult situations, and can provide a sense of perspective and lightness in the face of challenges.

There are many different ways that humour can be incorporated into our daily lives. Watching a funny movie or TV show, reading a humorous book or comic, or even just sharing a joke with a friend or family member can all be effective ways to boost mood and reduce stress. Additionally, many mental health professionals use humour as a therapeutic tool to help clients cope with difficult emotions and experiences.

By fostering social connections and promoting positive emotions, humour can be a valuable tool for maintaining mental health and promoting overall wellbeing.

In this issue, members of our community, including students, alumni and the counselling team, have shared their perspectives and thoughts on the role of humour in mental health and wellbeing. Happy reading!



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CONTRIBUTIONS FROM STUDENTS & MEMBERS OF AZIM PREMJI FOUNDATION

THE SUBTLETY OF HUMOUR; A TOOL AND A WEAPON

by Navya Sah (Arts Education Team)

Throughout centuries, ages and cultures, humour of different kinds have been used with different intentions. The interpretation and delivery of humour differs across class, nations, genders and many such dividing factors. However, surprisingly, the very same dividing factors can also be binding in nature. This is because certain groups of people with similar emotional wavelengths can accept certain sorts of humour more positively owing to their shared experiences and receptiveness capacities. This commonality of feeling is often a tool deployed by humour which could bring people together and also could create a support group for them. However, using humour with unawareness, subliminal derogatory messaging or ill-intention is a weapon that is often harnessed to hurt another's feelings without having to take responsibility.

Hence, humour is in itself a powerful tool or weapon that is highly influential on an individual or on many groups of people giving it an evasive chameleon-like characteristic that can change and forever live in grey areas. Here are

certain but not limited analysis of how it could be used. These are overviews of each of these categories which carry a lot more depth but for the purpose of this article, they provide an investigative starting point.

PHILOSOPHY AND HUMOUR

Yin Yoga is a holistic wellbeing practice that combines variable anatomy (1) with the ancient Chinese philosophy of Taoism to propose lighter ways of living through manoeuvring “the issues in our tissues.” (2) One of the most important tools that Taoism deploys to achieve this lightness is humour. For example, the humorous yin yoga example of Goldilocks (3) is used to underline the dense concept of moderation by referring to her choice making in the famous fable. This also translates to the approach of using

1) *Variable Anatomy is a concept that underlines that each skeleton is unique and different and hence in yin yoga, each asana is referred to as a modifiable shape for different kinds of skeletal structures and variations using the principles of flexion-extension, interior-exterior rotation and adduction-abduction.*

(2) Clark, Bernie. *The Complete Guide to Yin Yoga: The Philosophy and Practice of Yin Yoga*, 2012. Pg 246. White Cloud Press, United States.

(3) Clark, Bernie. *The Complete Guide to Yin Yoga: The Philosophy and Practice of Yin Yoga*, 2012. Pg 35. White Cloud Press, United States.

while practising the shapes of yin yoga. And when one takes this concept further, moderation can also be a philosophy that is applied in life. These dense concepts when approached by utilising the tool of humour, help in understanding the body and mind through a healthier mental health and not through limiting barriers like compulsion and expectation.

Taoists were known to laugh, smile and live lightly while accepting the happenings of life and the way of nature. Many books written on Taoism are illustrated comics like *The Way of Nature* (4) and light hearted retellings of stories by Taoist philosophers.

Taoists also go to the extent of sometimes ridiculing intelligence and academics. “Unlike other forms of life, though, people are easily led away from what’s right for them, because people have Brain, and Brain can be fooled. Inner Nature, when relied on, cannot be fooled”(5) as written by Benjamin Hoff in his book *Tao of Pooh*.

One other contesting factor one may have towards the usage of humour is that it can be a point of distress. Humour can be deployed to evade one’s actual feelings or to confess one’s feelings without directly having to address them, making it a manipulative tool or even an escapist’s solace. These amongst many

usages of humour are depreciative towards mental health and cause repressed damage to one’s conscious and subconscious minds.

Taoists are known to speak their truth in simple, unintellectual and direct words that may be harsh but also are honest. Taoism proposes a way of conversation making which is upfront and courageous.

SOMATICS AND HUMOUR

Connecting back to the physical practise of Yin Yoga and embodied ways of learning, one could realise the interconnections between Yin Yoga, philosophy and humour which can even loosely be translated as body, soul and mind in that order.

Practising yin yoga has a direct impact towards owning one’s own truth and coming closer to it. It enables one to accept themselves and speak with courage to address one’s own intentions while also somatically being affected by these emotional thoughts. It accounts into itself the chakra system or as the Chinese philosophy says the Dantian system (6) which gets somatically influenced while practising yin yoga. Thus, yin yoga judiciously helps to reach towards a better mental health by not using humour as an escape route, but as a way of acceptance and an acknowledgement of the truth as very well described in *Tao te Ching*’s numerous profound poems.

(4) Zhuangzi. *The Way of Nature*. Adapted and Illustrated by C.C. Tsai. Translated by Brian Bruya, 2019. Princeton University Press, United States.

(5) Hoff, Benjamin. *The Tao of Pooh*, 2019. Pg 57. Egmont UK Limited, UK.

(6) Shen, Qi and Jing - the causal, the spiritual and the physical fields of energy in the body

(7) Mitchell, Stephen. *Tao te ching*, 2011. Wisdom Tree, India.

THE POLITICS OF HUMOUR

As discussed before (8) humour is often used as an escape but it can also be a strategic tool used to convey revolutionary thoughts like when it is used in political humour. This can help a certain section of people to deal with their emotions towards injustice and find a common bonding narrative that helps appease their anger or deal with their indignation. Many comedy and stand up comedy shows also use humour to bring up individualistic as well as collective agitations to speak up and revolt against discriminations of any kind.

Hence, humour as a strategic tool can be used to deploy power, courage and honesty but as an escapist's tool, it can promote unawareness of self and poor mental health towards oneself or another.

The subtlety of humour is delicate and each shift in it can be used for a different purpose. Hence, humour as a tool for well-being or disruption should be carefully used with acute awareness of the intention. It can knowingly and unknowingly cause healing as well as trauma and leave a lasting invisible but felt impact.

(8) In the fourth paragraph under the section *Philosophy and Humour*

SPIRITUAL HUMOUR AND MENTAL HEALTH: HANDLING THE IRONY AND TRAGEDY OF LIFE METAPHYSICALLY

by Rajan

There is an inner life and an outer one. Both are immensely vast and open-ended for exploration. However, the inner life (mind or consciousness) is still much closer to us as we can connect to it, of course, in a sane condition, whenever we want, without shelter in the empirical world. Human consciousness or mind, which naturalists call "the Brain" is "wider than the sky, more profound than the ocean and weighs as much as Divinity" (Raveh, Coquereau, 2023, p.119), but sometimes it sickens due to unavoidable circumstances or personal reflections. Furthermore, a neuroscientist, a poet, an artist, a psychologist, an epistemologist, a meditation teacher, a phenomenologist, a saint, a pragmatist, a hedonist – all study human life and mind and offer a solution to one of the bad things in the world called "suffering" that comes in different formats and ways to us and disturbs the mental health. For reference, we may look at occasions such as death, diseases, pandemics, anxiety, relationship break-ups, natural disasters, fraud, injustices, and, to name a few, that reflect life's tragedy and irony in the first place. In other words, we may have different styles, approaches, lenses, methods, questions, and problems; and may look at



life and mind from any point of view. Adding to the series of mental health add-ons, this article aims to look at life with the philosophy of humour and how it promotes mental well-being.

The philosophical conception of humour slightly differs from the conventional notion or practice of humour. In our modern civilization, humour is somehow limited to stand-up comedy, meme culture and discourteous jokes and the like. Let us call it profane humour. This version of humour is unreal and very much limited since it will not work when we face extreme conditions, as referenced above, in life. The profane humour works as long as we are the actors or participants; outside these two positions, we return to the same irony and tragedy. This form of humour is much like having alcohol to overcome anxiety or stress, but when we return to the reality of time and situation, we either suffer more or look for another drink. Furthermore, every time, we cannot go for stand-up comedy, crack a joke, or scroll through the memes as life does not remain the same forever. These kinds of events and practices also require a sense of leisure, which we cannot always avail of. This is a precondition and limitation of profane humour. So what can we do in this regard? The answer is still the same, i.e., humour, but slightly different and refined, and we have called it the spiritual humour.

Questions will surely be raised about the nature and validity of spiritual humour. So let us understand this form of humour metaphorically. Imagine, you enter a dark room and strike with a snake kind of object, your heartbeat is fast, and your body is sweating and swearing in fear, but

your friend comes and turns on the light. Consequently, what you find is a rope there. The moment will be humours, but what metaphysical emerges here is that most of the time; things are not the same as they appear to us. We project our fear and anxiety upon the event, disturbing our mental health. Advaita Vedanta, the Indian philosophical school, called this action an act of "Superimposition" (Rao, 1998:123). The real thing is what is permanent, like spiritual humour. In addition, unreal is what is transitory and superimposed, like profane humour or rope as a snake in the darkroom before turning on the light.

Therefore, the metaphysical idea is that we need to understand the nature of reality and being (self) before making any judgment by turning on the spiritual and mental light analogous to turning on the light in a dark room to avoid the danger of making rope a snake. Those who fall into the trap of Superimposition suffer, and those who know the reality enjoy, as they know what is real and unreal. Thus, the nature of spiritual humour requires a metaphysical understanding of reality. Another good thing about spiritual humour is that one does not need to insult others to make people laugh, which is a typical practice of profane humour at some point. What's more, spiritual humour will help us laugh at the profane humour and other absurdity of life and liberate us from the conventional irony and tragedies, consequently improving our mental health in the long-run. The whole world and objects out there, except the creation of the universe, are the byproducts of the human mind and creativity. So let us create the beautiful and real things like the spiritual humour and cherish the life. As

Nietzsche allegorically expressed: "...And we should consider every day lost on which we have not danced (laughed) at least once. Moreover, we should call every truth false (superimposed), which was not accompanied by at least one laugh." (Stankard, Viets, 2012:120, italics added).

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MENTAL HEALTH AND LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIP: A CHECKLIST BY ROLAND BARTHES

by Anshul Rai Sharma

1. Anxiety is your companion. Keep waiting for the call, keep cursing the trivial delays. Remember that Radiohead song as you anxiously await through the night. You reach a saturation point that when you do get on call you are miserably tired and have nothing much to say to the beloved. An empty call. The song goes 'I'm not living I'm just killing time.'

2. Don't sleep, sleep is for the dead. Compromise your health. Use distance as an excuse to pursue all kinds of vices that you harbor. Smoke more cigarettes in a day. Not a smoker? Never a good time to start than now. Get on with it. Exhale. Don't think about the issues to address them, let nicotine do its job. Easy. At no point should you think that this is real life. Keep playing the home movie in your mind where you are the abandoned lover. Don't bother with Dylan's lyrics: 'I've been deceived by the clown inside of me'.

3. Be constantly in the terror of breakdown. The beloved is away, and it is unfair to think about distance as anything other than agony. Even on days you feel good, remind yourself that you should not be feeling good in the beloved's absence. Rude. The only song in your room: In My Solitude by Billie Holliday.

4. To try to express yourself is to confront yourself, avoid this at all costs. No one wants to hear you express your love. In fact, every time you mention that four letter word the entire universe cringes. Don't even think about it. Instead, prefer complaining. 'Oh, you know, my partner lives away, it's terrible'. Complaining is sexy. Make it sexy rather than real. That's the way to do it.

5. Remember Narcissus's cry: Me! And me! What about me!

6. Attention, Attention, Attention, that is what you crave. Throw out the pseudo-liberal concepts of privacy and personal space. You need attention and you had better make sure to get it. Keep calling the beloved. Instead of making the communication meaningful, focus on frequency. Call five times a day. It's called being pro-active. Lennon's words, 'I call your name, but you're not there'. When there is no response, relapse in a spiral of anxiety and stay there.

7. Active listening, empathy and concern are for juveniles. Instead, drop subtle signs to your beloved. They may not understand, given the distance and their own lives. Regardless, keep pursuing the path of the convoluted lover. 'Love is Strange' according to Mickey & Sylvia 'After you've had it, you're in an awful mix'. Remember, a true relationship is never simple. It's supposed to be messy and confusing, for everyone.

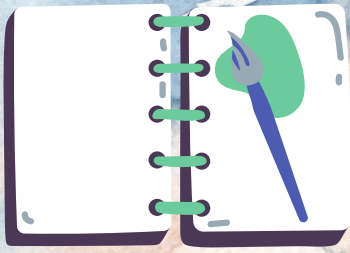
8. Discuss: Not with the beloved, no way, but with everyone other than the beloved. Instead of saying to the loved one 'hey, I

think something is wrong, can we talk?'. Bring the tension to other relationships, discuss it with other people, give them a chance to present their earnest views about the whole thing and make the situation bearable by making it worse.

9. Avoid disagreements with the beloved, they're not worth it. Who wants to get into a zone of confrontation that bears the promise of genuine dialogue. Instead, agree to most things, like a robot. If fact, why bother paying attention to your differences, let them be. Disagreements equal disrespect. Don't you dare.

10. Keep checking your phone incessantly, the slightest 'amorous' emotion should bring you to tears. A true long distance lover weeps often, and in floods. Our talisman: wake up and weep. Technology exists to gratify you and make sure you employ it that way. Less than five hours of screentime is a shame on you. Do better. Do more. When things get worse, play Miss you by Rolling Stones at high volume so that everyone around you knows. Sing with Jagger, sing for the one.





VEDA'S VISUAL VERSES

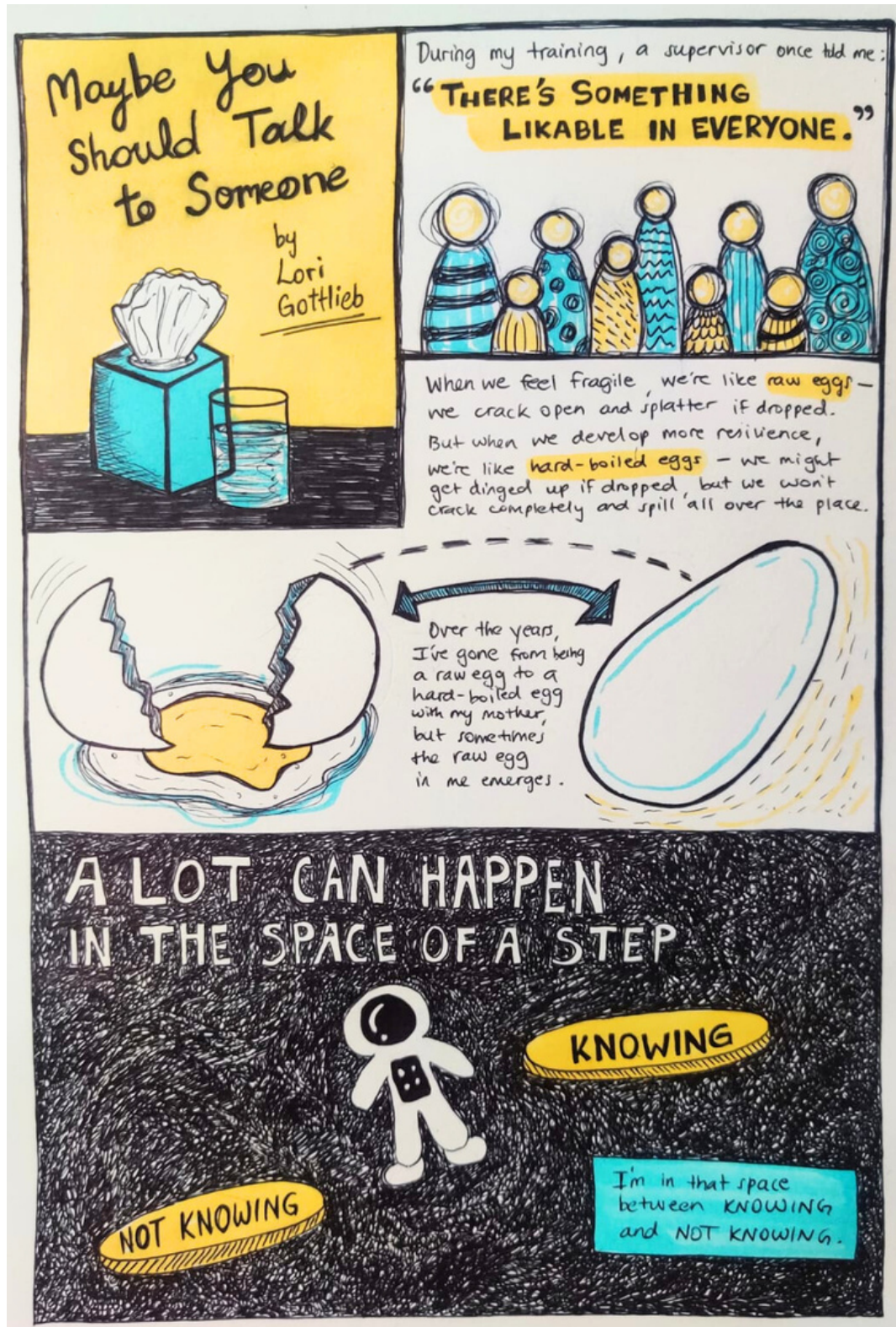
AS JULIA CAMERON ONCE SAID, "ART OPENS THE CLOSETS, AIRS OUT THE CELLARS AND ATTICS. IT BRINGS HEALING."
WELCOME TO A SPACE WHERE I EXPLORE MENTAL HEALTH THEMES AND CAPTURE EXPERIENCES THROUGH ART AND WRITING!

THERAPEUTIC LAUGHTER

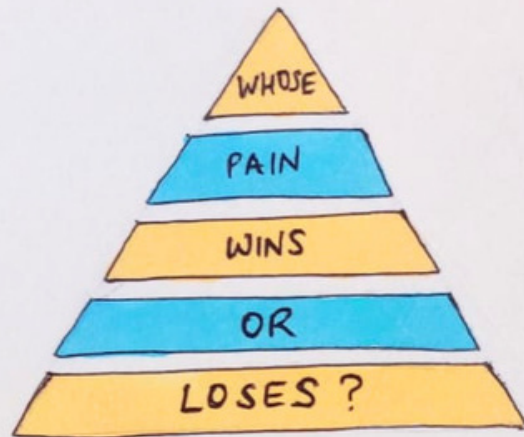
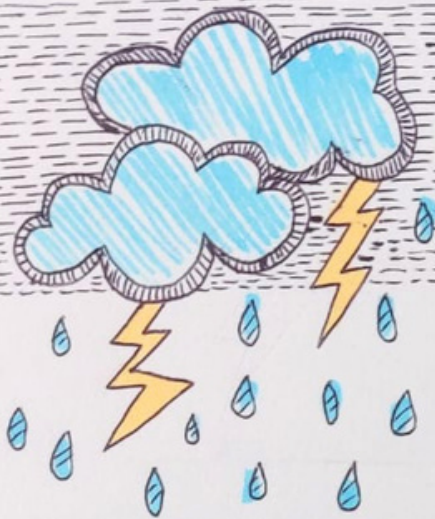
HOW LORI GOTTLIEB'S BOOK "MAYBE YOU SHOULD TALK TO SOMEONE" CAPTURES VULNERABILITY WITH LEVITY

"Maybe You Should Talk to Someone" by Lori Gottlieb is a book that takes readers on a journey through the world of therapy from both the perspective of a therapist and a client by weaving together personal anecdotes from her own life, stories of her clients, and her experiences as a therapist to create a captivating read.

One of the most notable aspects of Gottlieb's writing is her use of humor. Throughout the book, she employs a wry and self-deprecating sense of humor that adds levity to what could otherwise be a heavy and serious subject matter. Her humor helps to make the book more approachable and relatable, inviting readers to connect with her on a personal level, so give it a read!



Sometimes in their pain, people believe that the agony will last forever. But feelings are actually more like WEATHER SYSTEMS — they blow in and they blow out.



There's no hierarchy of pain. Suffering shouldn't be ranked, because pain is not a contest. Spouses often forget this, upping the ante on their suffering — I had the kids all day. My job is more demanding than yours. I'm lonelier than you are.

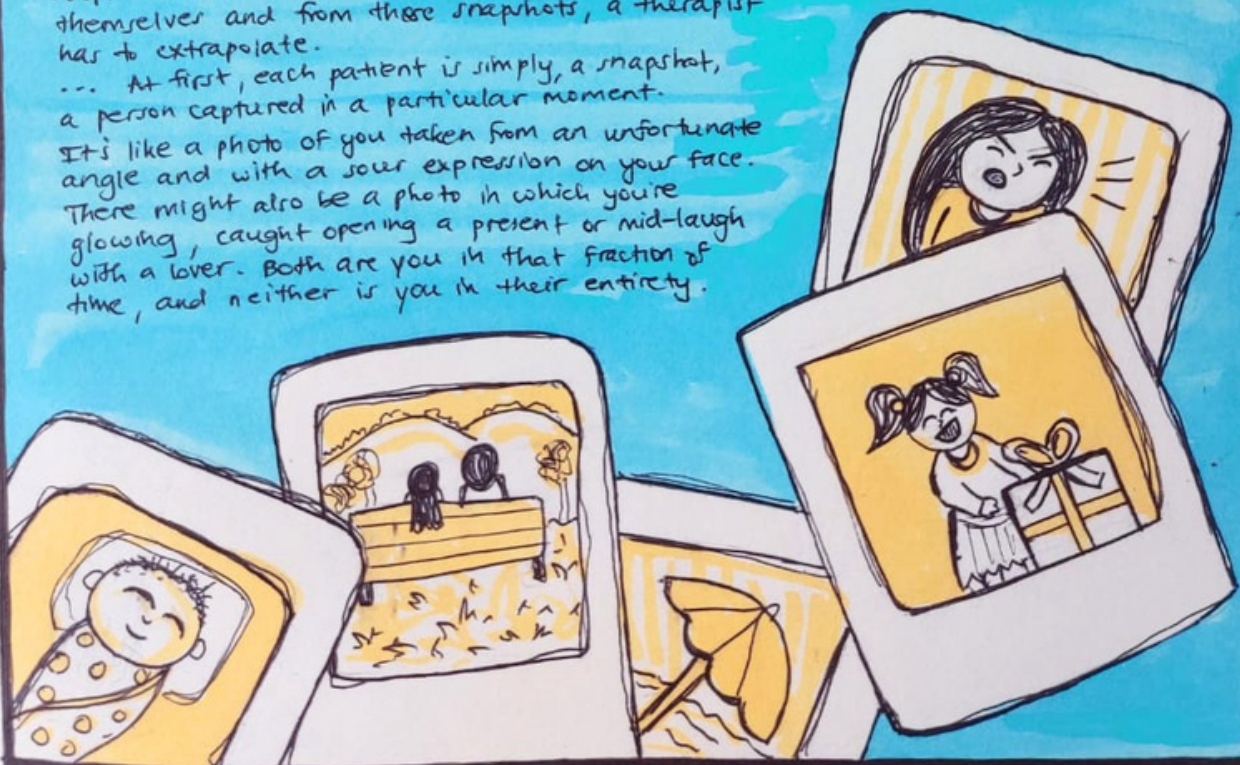
WHOSE PAIN WINS — OR LOSES?

MOST THINGS WORTH DOING ARE DIFFICULT.

People who come to therapy present snapshots of themselves and from those snapshots, a therapist has to extrapolate.

... At first, each patient is simply, a snapshot, a person captured in a particular moment.

It's like a photo of you taken from an unfortunate angle and with a sour expression on your face. There might also be a photo in which you're glowing, caught opening a present or mid-laugh with a lover. Both are you in that fraction of time, and neither is you in their entirety.





SWATI'S STORYBOARD

COLLATING VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

The community was invited to share responses, observations, experiences and stories about humour and mental health

A story/incident when humour has come to you or someone you know, as a de-stressor. What did it make possible for you/them?

My dad I had a heated conversation regarding my marriage and in frustration he screamed at the top of his voice "get out".. and in my head, I can't control my laugh ..how can anyone be so melodramatic I thought and that whole serious conversation had no effect on me .. although he expected me to take it seriously.

Certain people in your life are like the personal professional joker. They say the commonest of things in the whole world and yet manage to somehow bring a smile even on the worst days. When someone rants or talks about a very serious problem that has spoilt their day or had a tough time dealing with. This perennial joker, says the most insignificant things in their day absolutely heartless sometimes, and manages to bring a sense of ridiculous-ness that lightens the overall mood. :) I am glad to have such people, and be one for some of my friends.

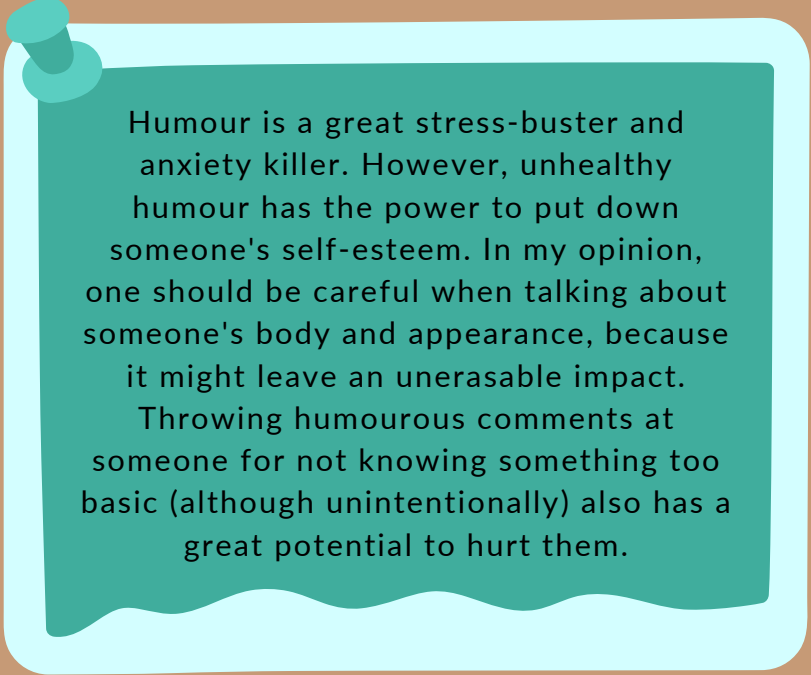
There are many incidents..one such is I watched a few episodes of Tom and Jerry and other cartoons when I was feeling too low and the mood definitely improved every time

My elder son is struggling with anxiety disorder for quite sometime. Whenever I share the funny pranks that I had played on my friends during my school or college days , it helps to destress him. It lightens up the home environment and many a times he opens up his heart and shares his desires.

Just last week, we had a lot on our plates and one of us said a rather silly joke and all of us burst out laughing. One after the other, a few more jokes followed. It gave us all the much-needed respite and we laughed like that probably after a really long time.

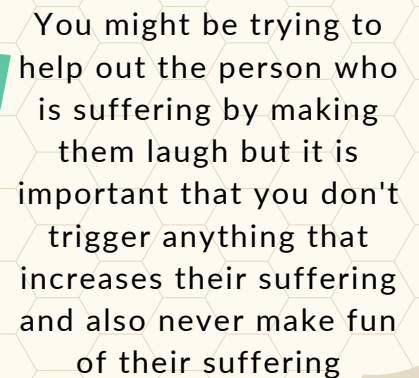
What is something to be cautious about, when using humour as a de-stressor?

The intensity of the situation should first be understood before making a joke. There are times when it is okay to joke around, while at other times, what the other person needs is a trusted friend, non-judging, open ears, a shoulder to cry on etc. Analysing the situation is essential before making any jokes, no matter how lighthearted they are.

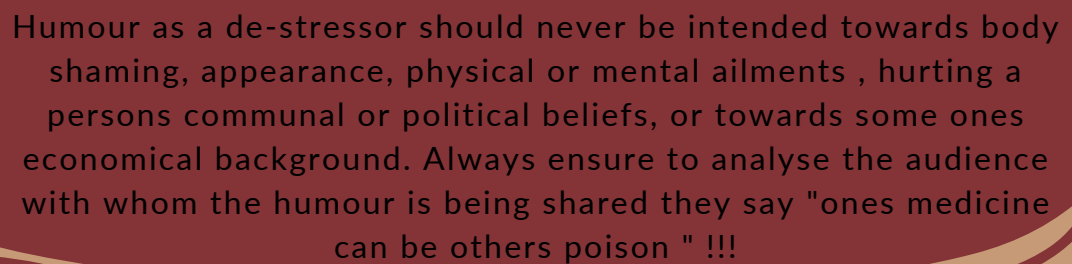


Humour is a great stress-buster and anxiety killer. However, unhealthy humour has the power to put down someone's self-esteem. In my opinion, one should be careful when talking about someone's body and appearance, because it might leave an unerasable impact.

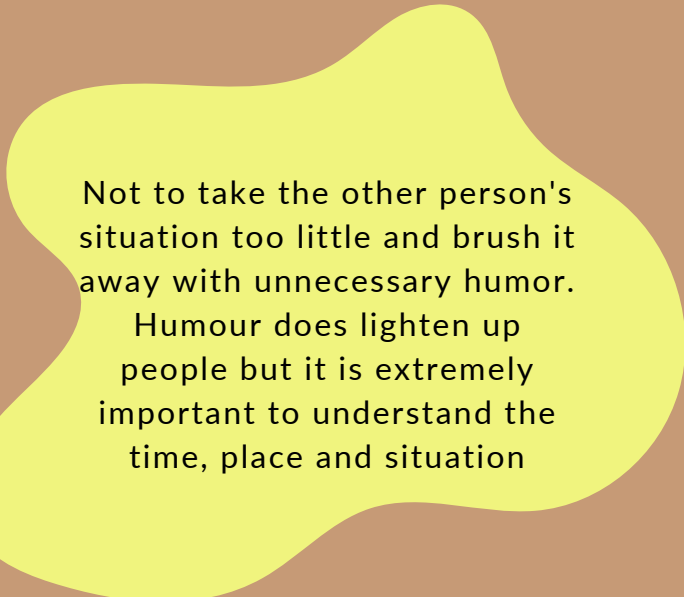
Throwing humorous comments at someone for not knowing something too basic (although unintentionally) also has a great potential to hurt them.



You might be trying to help out the person who is suffering by making them laugh but it is important that you don't trigger anything that increases their suffering and also never make fun of their suffering

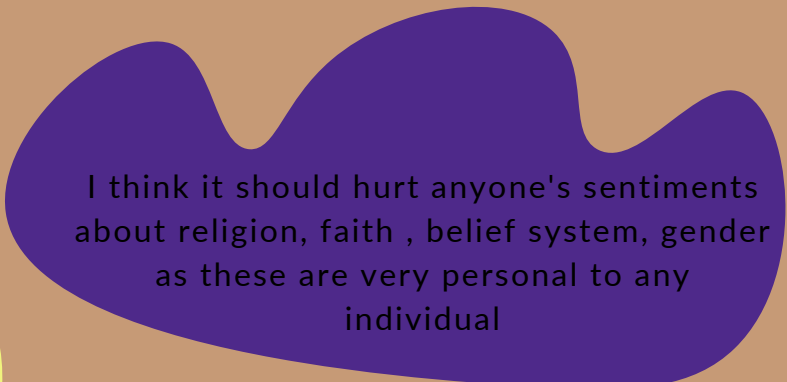


Humour as a de-stressor should never be intended towards body shaming, appearance, physical or mental ailments, hurting a person's communal or political beliefs, or towards someone's economical background. Always ensure to analyse the audience with whom the humour is being shared they say "one's medicine can be another's poison" !!!

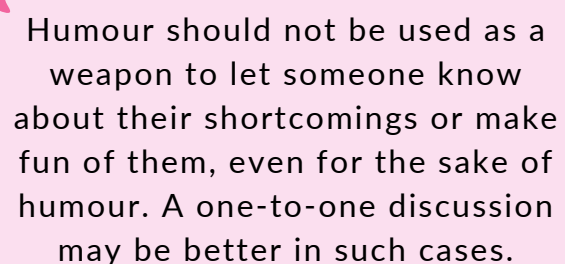


Not to take the other person's situation too little and brush it away with unnecessary humor.

Humour does lighten up people but it is extremely important to understand the time, place and situation



I think it should hurt anyone's sentiments about religion, faith, belief system, gender as these are very personal to any individual



Humour should not be used as a weapon to let someone know about their shortcomings or make fun of them, even for the sake of humour. A one-to-one discussion may be better in such cases.

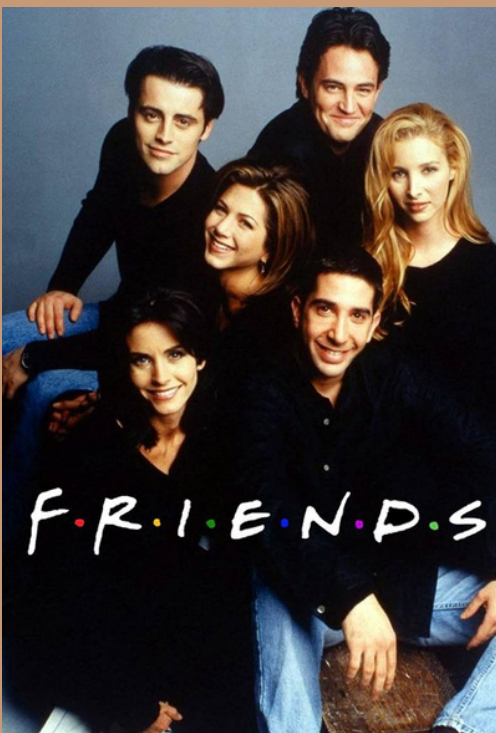
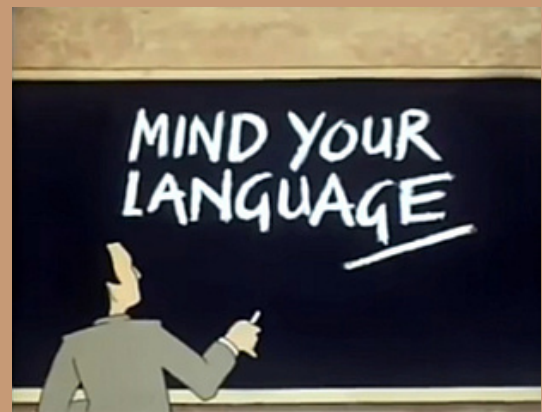
**Do you have a particular
funny web-
page/show/Instagram
handle/YouTube channel
you would recommend, to
work out some distress?**



reddit memes that my friend
sends me



YouTube comedy shorts



Zakir Khan's shayari



@aiyyoshraddha

@thekurtaguy

@kiara_minime

**THANK
YOU!**

**to all of you who
contributed to the
Storyboard! It was a
delight to read all your
responses!**



LAUGHTER, THE SPARKLE IN THE SHADOWS

In shadows deep, where anguish hides, A spark of light, the soul's sweet guide.
Humor, a balm, in depths unknown, Where mental battles oft are sown.

A giggle dances, a ray of hope, A medicine to help us cope. Through trials dire,
it lends its hand, Unveiling strength, where scars expand.

A jest can lift the burdens' weight, Transform despair to lighter state. In
laughter's realm, we find release, Embracing joy, granting heart's peace.

The clown, a jester, masks the pain, With jests and tricks, a smile to regain.
Behind the mask, emotions blend, A hidden tale, yet to transcend.

In jokes and puns, a healing art, Humor mends wounds, a vibrant part Of
mental landscapes, often bleak, Awakening solace when we seek.

So, let us cherish laughter's grace, In mental struggles, find a place, To
celebrate the human soul, In humor's warmth, we can be whole.

Let humor bloom, a brilliant flower, A respite from life's darkest hour. In jests
and chuckles, may we find, A sanctuary for heart and mind.

LAKSHMI'S LENS



How A Good Dose of Laughter Can Impact Your Holistic Wellness



Cognition

The frontal lobe, which aids in context understanding, the motor cortex, which regulates muscles, and the limbic system, which controls happy emotions, are all activated when you laugh or simply witness someone else laughing.

Stress

Laughter reduces the production of stress hormones in the body and also increases the production of endorphins, the body's natural "feel good" hormone.



Pain Tolerance

The production of endorphins also helps you tolerate pain better, meaning you can actually laugh some of your pain away!

Immunity

When you smile or laugh, your brain undergoes a chemical change that results in the production of tiny proteins known as neuropeptides. These minute molecules support immunological tolerance and might aid in the battle against potentially fatal infections.





Cardiac Health

Laughter gets your heart pumping and burns a similar amount of calories per hour as walking at a slow to moderate pace, making it a great cardio workout! It also reduces the risk of a stroke and heart attack by lowering your blood pressure.



Humor as a construct permeates our everyday lives, brightening even the duller moments. Beyond its entertainment value, humor serves several psychological and social functions that contribute to our overall well-being. In this article, we delve into the fascinating world of everyday humor and explore the psychological mechanisms behind its effects on individuals and society.

In everyday life, humor acts as a coping mechanism during challenging situations. Whether dealing with a difficult day at work or navigating personal struggles, humor can offer a temporary escape from stress. Sharing jokes or finding humor in adverse

JOKE'S - A - PART

circumstances allows individuals to reframe their perspective, making problems seem less daunting and more manageable.

Humor also plays a crucial role in communication. A well-timed joke or witty remark can enhance a conversation, making it more engaging and memorable. Humor often involves wordplay, double meanings, and clever twists, which stimulate cognitive processes and encourage creativity.

In conclusion, everyday humor is more than just a source of entertainment; it plays a vital role in human psychology and social dynamics. From forging bonds and reducing stress to enhancing communication and promoting resilience, humor has a profound impact on our lives.



ROBIN WILLIAMS: EXPLORING HIS HUMOR AND MENTAL HEALTH JOURNEY

Robin Williams, an iconic figure in the world of comedy and entertainment, brought immeasurable joy and laughter to millions of people. However, behind the mask of humor, Williams battled with profound mental health challenges. He was someone a lot of us grew up watching. Dead Poets Society, Patch Adams, Flubber, Genie, were only some of the movies that made me laugh so much.

I remember when he passed away in 2014. It was a loss so many people, young and old grieved, having watched him grow as a performer on screen.

He was known for his frenetic energy, improvisational skills, and rapid-fire wit. His performances on stage, filled with a blend of observational humor, impersonations, and imaginative storytelling, captivated audiences and catapulted him to fame. Williams was a very versatile actor. He demonstrated his dramatic depth in films like Good Will Hunting, and Awakenings. His ability to seamlessly transition between comedy and drama solidified his status as a multifaceted performer.

Throughout his life, he used comedy as a coping mechanism to navigate personal struggles and emotional turmoil. His quick wit and ability to find humor in the midst of pain not only entertained others but also served as a form of self-expression and therapy for himself. His performances brought people together and gave people a break from the challenges of daily life. He used laughter as a vehicle for healing and shared this gift with the world, fostering a sense of joy and lightness amidst the complexities of the human experience.

Behind his infectious laughter, Robin Williams battled with depression, bipolar disorder, and substance abuse. He was open about his experiences with periods of intense sadness and despair shedding light on the profound impact of depression on individuals, regardless of outward success. He turned to drugs and alcohol as a means of self-medication. These dependencies further complicated his mental health battles, creating a vicious cycle that exacerbated his struggles.

He used his platform and influence to raise awareness about mental health issues. He openly discussed his struggles, helping to

reduce stigma and fostering important conversations about mental well-being and the importance of seeking help. Robin Williams incorporated mental health themes into his comedic performances, addressing the human condition and challenging societal stigmas. By infusing humor into these discussions, he provided a relatable entry point for audiences to engage with sensitive topics. His vulnerability and courage in sharing his own mental health journey helped destigmatize mental health issues, promoting understanding and empathy for those experiencing similar challenges.

Sadly, Robin Williams died by suicide on August 11, 2014, leaving behind a

profound void in the entertainment industry and in the hearts of many people. It will be nine years since his passing this August. His life shed light on the complexity of mental health. Despite his talent, success, and ability to bring joy to others, he grappled with internal battles that were often hidden from public view. His story is a reminder that mental health challenges can affect anyone, regardless of external circumstances.

Robin Williams' legacy encourages us to find hope, compassion, and support. Through his humor, he brought light to darkness, reminding us of the power of laughter and human connection in navigating the complexities of mental health.



Robin Williams in Patch Adams playing the title role.



SHIBANI'S SNIPPETS

SO WHAT DOES "PSYCHOLOGY" ACTUALLY SAY....?

Humor is an important ingredient in our lives. A big part of our social interactions and individual personas, all of us have experienced it in some form or other. From classroom banter, to interpersonal relationships, to workplace, to brief encounters, to even nature partaking in creating humor, we see it everyday. Oh. Also, Social media. It's now one of the main sources of humor delivered right onto our senses. Suffice to say, we experience a variety of flavors of humor. This variety can however lead to both positive and negative affect. Well, sure. Humor has a positive connotation to it but it's not so simple either, right? Case in point, the complexity that exists in its forms.

We know that there are certain kinds of humor. Literature is full of evidences of it. Some psychologists have even come up with four styles of humor, affiliative (that brings people together), self-enhancing (that helps people make sense of and manage difficult times), self deprecating (making jokes at one's own expense) and aggressive (when another person is at the receiving end).

While there are benefits to self deprecating humor, research has found it negatively affecting mental health in the long run.

While each joke has its place, self deprecating humor is an interesting and tricky form of humor. For example, nowadays memes that frequently exaggerate the emotional and mental health struggles, or downplay the abilities of an individual, are found all over social media. More often than not we find ourselves sharing them, relating to them or at least chuckling on encountering one. However, what makes it interesting is this false idea of using self deprecating humor to elevate the mood and consequently mental health.

Multiple studies indicate that self deprecating humor is linked to low self esteem. It is associated with decreased forgiveness, further compounding self-esteem by making it harder to let go of perceived failures.

Research has also found that people who use self-deprecating humor are less likely to use adaptive coping and show cognitive distortions around stressful life events, leading to unpleasant emotional states. Self-deprecating humor is correlated with reduced resilience and well-being in multiple studies.

Several research have also linked depression and self deprecating humor. Lower levels of positive humor and higher levels of negative humor are associated with depression. It is associated not just with depression, but overall with diminished mental health.

Self-deprecating humor is generally also related with wonky social functioning too at times. A large study including people from 15 countries found that loneliness is uniquely associated with self-defeating humor. This can also be linked to reduced effectiveness of social interactions.

Although most humor centres around entertainment and fun, the gist of these research points us in the direction of how self deprecating humor can start a loop of self fulfilling prophecy. It might be charming and seemingly self aware initially but, after a point can lead to more insecurity and self-doubt, thus showing its ill-effects on mental health and general wellbeing.

Self deprecating humor may have its issues, yet it can have its positive effects too. It can act as an adhesive and its social media popularity can give a sense of belongingness to its admirers. Another benefit of this type of humor is that it makes someone seem modest and relatable, which can surely be a nice quality for friends, colleagues and partners to have, and a good bonding tool but then the question is how much is too much?

Well, here is some food for thought :)



STUDIES SHOW THAT...

The field of psychology has contributed a lot to research methodology. It has been unique in the way that it often balances the fine line between science and the society we live in. We have seen ground breaking, myth busting experiments, such as Milgram's experiment on obedience, which showed that good, 'civilized' Samaritans are capable of inflicting pain on each other if an authority figure is present, and there is emotional detachment from the subject on whom the pain is being inflicted on. The experiment coincided with and was partially inspired by Adolf Eichmann's arrest and trial, and subsequent execution, and showed that a lot of Nazi crimes were committed due to the system being efficient, like a machine, and soldiers constantly obeying the orders of their seniors.

There are others too, like Pavlov's experiment on classical conditioning, and the Stanford Prison Experiment, which provided important insights on human behaviour.

On the flipside, there have been experiments which gave you a chuckle at the least, and at their worst, were simply bizarre. Even with the hilarity, they still make you think, and honestly, some of these studies have contributed conceptually to understanding the human psyche immensely. Here are a few of them. Mind you, these are real studies done on real participants, by distinguished members of academia:

1. Title - [Inhibiting and facilitating conditions of the human smile: a non obtrusive test of the facial feedback hypothesis](#)

Description - Fritz Strack wanted to study facial feedback hypothesis, the phenomena where facial feedback, for example forcing yourself to smile, can generate an emotional response, like you feeling happy. In this particular study, however, Strack discovered that holding a pen in one's mouth makes one smile which in turn makes them happier, and then he discovered that it does not.

Remarks - So... does holding a pen in one's mouth make one happy or not? I'm confused. Also, what happens to people who have a habit of chewing on the pen that's in their mouth? Asking for a friend.

2. Title - Creatures of the night: Chronotypes and Dark Triad Traits

Description – Jonason, Jones, and Lyon discovered in this study that people who are more self-admiring, manipulative, and psychopathic tend to stay up till late at night, or are 'night people'.

Remarks – THIS IS OBJECTIVELY NOT TRUE! THIS IS PROPAGANDA AGAINST PEOPLE WHO WANT TO STAY UP AT NIGHT BECAUSE IT IS A MORE PEACEFUL TIME. THE REAL PSYCHOPATHS ARE MORNING PEOPLE WHO WAKE UP AT 5 AM AND GO FOR RUNS. I WILL WRITE TO APA ABOUT THIS. WE WILL NOT PUT UP WITH DIRECT ATTACKS AND DISCRIMINATION!

3. Title - Eyebrows cue Grandiose Narcissism

Description – Giacomini and Rule found that narcissists on an average have thicker, bolder eyebrows.

Remarks – This... makes a lot of sense.



4. Title - Is "Huh?" a Universal Word? Conversational Infrastructure and the Convergent Evolution of Linguistic Items

Description – Dingemanse, Torreira, and Enfield argued that humans needed a special word to interrupt others in conversation to get more details and clarity. Thus, 'huh?' came into existence.

Remarks – Huh?



5. Title - Beauty is in the Eye of the Beer Holder: People who think they are drunk also think they are attractive

Description – A bunch of scientists found in their studies that people think they are more attractive when they drink beer (or other alcohols)

Remarks – This makes sense. Alcohol creates a lack of inhibition, and gives a false sense of perception and security, including a person's own assessment of their attractiveness. They might go talk

to people they're attracted to, something they might be nervous to do so when they're sober. They might call up their exes. They might get on top of water tanks wearing their shoes as hats and yell 'I am Zeus, God of Thunder, King of Gods, Husband of Hera, Father of A Million Children and The Reason Why Greek Mythology is This Long!'. Drink responsibly, kids.



6. Title - National Income Inequality predicts cultural variation in mouth to mouth kissing

Description - Watkins, in his study, found that high-income inequality partners are more likely to engage in French kissing than the rest.

Remarks - So... what happens with partners having comparable or similar incomes? It's okay, I don't want to know. Ever.

7. Title - Elucidation of Chemical Compounds Responsible for Foot Malodour

Description - A group of scientists in Japan discovered that people who think they have foot odour, do, and people who think they don't have foot odour, don't.

Remarks - I heavily disagree with this conclusion. There are plenty of people who don't think they have foot odour, but oh boy, just wait till they take their shoes off.





FAIREN'S FORUM



HUMOR CAN BE SAVING GRACE IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS

Picture this, Life without Humor! To me, it's like eating a sandwich without the filling – bland, tasteless, and a total snooze-fest!

Humor can be saving grace in our relationships, then be at workplace, with friends or with your romantic partner. Let us all admit, Humor is the ultimate icebreaker! It's like the secret code to unlocking new friendships and awkward situations. If you find the right tone, humor can be helpful for owning your part and diffusing tension.

Humorous banter can help us avoid the ping pong of defensiveness that we often see in our romantic relationships. Let's be honest, just because I'm anxious doesn't mean I'm consistent. During the pandemic, I remember yelling at my partner to put on a mask and then turning around to share my water with a friend. . But by playfully chiding me for my hypocrisy, rather than outright calling me a hypocrite, my partner uses humor to help us navigate our stresses.

Humor can really help in strengthening our relationships. Let's explore some creative and insightful aspects of humor in relationships:



1. The Shared Inside Joke: The moment two individual find themselves laughing uncontrollably at a private, quirky joke, an invisible thread ties them together forever. It's a secret language that only they understand, and every time it resurfaces, it rekindles the warmth of their connection.



2. Laughter as a healing tool: In the toughest of times, laughter becomes the soothing balm that heals emotional wounds. When life throws curveballs, couples who can laugh together find the strength to face adversity hand in hand.

3. Playful Teasing vs. Harmful Banter: Humor is a double-edged sword. Playful teasing can strengthen a relationship by adding light-heartedness, but excessive or hurtful banter can chip away the foundation of trust and respect in the relationship.



4. Acceptance and Vulnerability: Humor flourishes in an environment of acceptance and vulnerability. Sharing embarrassing stories or admitting mistakes creates a bond of authenticity that strengthens relationship.

5. Finding the right tone: Humor is always embedded in context and varies greatly depending on cultural backgrounds, individual preferences, and social appropriateness. While finding the right tone of humor can be a very subjective and nuanced process, understanding the people you are interacting with, their sensibilities, their cultural backgrounds and paying attention to their humor styles can help build deeper relationships with others.





AMRITA'S ACCOUNT



HUMOUR AND MENTAL HEALTH THE POWER OF LAUGHTER



Laughter has so many stories to tell. Different experiences of our lives are filled with varied kinds of laughter and each has its own share to cherish. We all associate laughter in our unique ways. Snorting laughter, nervous laughter, shy laughter, fake laughter, belly laughter, contagious laughter, embarrassed laughter and many more. How much this laughter enriches our lives.

“

LAUGHTER IS THE
LANGUAGE OF THE
SOUL.

PABLO NERUDA

”

Laughter looks like such a normal and natural process, we automatically laugh when something is funny. Is it? Well not necessarily. We don't always laugh at something we think is funny, sometimes we just feel amused and smile and that also gives us a sense of pleasure. What might be funny for me, may not be funny for others. We all have our unique sense of humour.

But we also laugh at things that are not funny. For example, we laugh sometimes when we feel awkward, or feel embarrassed in a public setting. Sometimes critical feedback is accompanied with a small laugh to make it look not so serious. We use laughter as a coping mechanism. People also laugh involuntarily while recalling a scary incident. Laughter is a language that runs deeper than words and the power of laughter in our lives is noteworthy

Like a medicine it helps enormously in boosting our immune system, elevates our mood, reduces pain and helps us protect from the harmful effects of stress. Laughter brings a sense of playfulness in our lives. When we are surrounded by problems, we can adopt this sense of playfulness to play around the challenges and find solutions. It brings a sense of realization that 'I am not a problem' and through making the problem into a play, can experiment new solutions.

Can you recall an incident when you were in the middle of a fight with your close ones and burst into laughter?

helped ease the tense environment. Laughter helps in releasing anger and forgiving people. It helps in easing out the emotions and gives a clear headway to talk things more openly with others in tense situations.

With so much power to heal and renew, the ability to laugh is a great resource for conquering our challenges, improves our relationships with others, and enhancing our emotional and physical health.

“

**‘Always laugh when you can,
it's a cheap medicine.’
-Lord Byron.**

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CONVERSATIONS' INITIATIVES



- INCLUSIVE
- ACCEPTING
- SAFE
- AFFIRMING
- SUPPORTIVE

Queer and Here

LGBTQIA+ Support Group

A space for LGBTQIA+ students to connect, share their experiences and feelings, offer and receive support from each other

Open to all students who identify as LGBTQIA+.

**Weekly support group
1.5 hours
In-person**

To know more about the group and sign up, write to conversations@apu.edu.in and we will send you the registration form and further details.

CONVERSATIONS' INITIATIVES



POSTGRADUATE PATHWAY PROGRAMME



Moving to a new city and joining in for post-graduation can be overwhelming and a huge change for many students. Keeping this in mind, Lakshmi and Fairen from the Conversations team conducted a session for the postgraduate students from the School of Development and School of Education as part of the Postgraduate Pathway Programme. The students were briefed about culture shock, changes and transitions they might experience at this point, the importance of mental health, stigma around mental health, the support system to reach out to on campus along with our centre's functions & policies.

CONVERSATIONS' INITIATIVES



SELF CARE SESSION FOR TEACHERS (DIPLOMA OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION)

Lakshmi, Kavitha and Swati from the team conducted a workshop on 'Self Care and Mental Health' for the educators enrolled in the Diploma and Certificate Course in Inclusive Education. The workshop focused on the idea of acknowledging their ways of resisting the challenges that come with being inclusive educators in the larger education system amongst all stakeholders. There was a solidarity in the sharings of the group, of various struggles that come with playing such a role. They broke into an activity to work on recognising internal, individual and community resources that they have and sharing with the larger group amongst quotes and songs that capture their journeys. It ended with a debrief on self care, how to balance energies, different kinds of self care and boundaries.



CONVERSATIONS' INITIATIVES



SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES SUMMER PROGRAMME

Conversations conducted two sessions as part of the SAS Summer Programme. The first session, facilitated by Lakshmi and Amrita, was an orientation to our centre as well as a space to discuss and reflect on the transition and journey of each student in joining Azim Premji University. Students discussed what they were letting go and losing as they joined the university, how they were adapting as well as what they are looking forward to now that they are here on campus.



CONVERSATIONS' INITIATIVES



The second session for the SAS Summer Programme was about Resilience, facilitated by Veda, Swati and Pratik. Students answered a questionnaire to check in with how resilient they are and created a resilience plan to proactively help them through challenging times they may face. The session ended with a progressive relaxation technique that students could practice on their own as well.

