

The Four Humor Mechanisms

K. A. Neuendorf

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The scholarly literature on humor to date has identified four broad mechanisms of humor—ways in which we might find something funny. Each of these four emerges from a body of work that identifies the underlying assumptions of the particular approach to humor, and also provides a reasonable amount of empirical support for its existence (Martin, 2007). While most scholars writing within these literatures take the view that one particular mechanism is paramount (often to the exclusion of the other mechanisms), it is our view that multiple mechanisms are possible, and that these may come into play simultaneously when a receiver encounters a potentially humorous stimulus. Further, we contend that any examination of humor must begin with this taxonomy of humor types.

These four independent mechanisms are:

1. **Disparagement:** Among others, Freud (1960) recognized the aggressive basis in many jokes. As far back as Aristotle (McKeon, 1941), laughter is seen as originating in malice. Seventeenth-century British philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1651/1981) reinforced the notion of humor being derived from a sense of superiority over others. More recently, the superiority mechanism has been validated in work by the theoretic examinations of Gruner (1978) and the quantitative research of Zillmann and Bryant (1974; 1980; Zillmann & Cantor, 1976) and LaFave (LaFave, Haddad, and Maesen, 1976). Common applications of humor aimed at engaging this mechanism include racist and sexist humor (Thomas & Esses, 2004). Attempts to generate a superiority mechanism in response to potentially humorous stimuli include “putdown” humor, satire, sarcasm, self-deprecation, and the display of stupid behaviors.

2. **Incongruity:** The juxtaposition of inconsistent or incongruous elements is the focus of this oft-mentioned mechanism by which humor might be apprehended. Dating at least back to German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (Martin, 2007), this notion was further elaborated by Arthur Koestler (1964). His concept of bisociation is an attempt to explain the mental processes involved in the humorous resolution of incongruous stimuli, as well as the process of artistic creativity and scientific discovery. Briefly, these theoretical approaches indicate that humor is experienced when two disparate perspectives are simultaneously experienced; the joy of humor derives from the “solving” of the incongruous puzzle. Contemporary empirical support for this mechanism of humor includes a series of studies by Shultz and colleagues (e.g., Shultz & Horibe, 1974) and others (Perlmutter, 2002; Vaid et al., 2003; Veal, 2004). Particular types of humor intended to generate an incongruity mechanism response include wordplay (e.g., puns), “pure” incongruity, absurdity, and sight gags.

3. **Arousal:** Although early attempts to explicate this possible mechanism for experiencing humor emphasized the humorous response as a method of relieving pent-up psychological strain or tension (e.g., the works of writers/philosophers Immanuel Kant and Herbert Spencer; Spencer, 1860), a later articulation by psychologist Daniel Berlyne (1972) posited two arousal-related processes—arousal boost and arousal jag. The arousal boost mechanism operates when a pleasurable increase in generalized arousal results from a humorous stimulus. The arousal jag mechanism comes into play when arousal passes an optimal level, and a punchline or other resolution successfully reduces arousal to a pleasurable level once again. Arousal-provoking humor may be manifested in a variety of ways, such as slapstick, dark humor, sick humor, and sexual or naughty humor.

4. **Social currency:** Although less often acknowledged as an independent dimension of humor apprehension, social interaction humor has been studied as a means of building and maintaining relationships (e.g., Chapman, 1983; Fine, 1983; Lamaster, 1975). Humor may be experienced as the pleasure derived from playful interaction (Apter, 1982), the establishment of a functional social hierarchy (Fry, 1963), or the achievement of a sense of group belonging or understanding (Dundes, 1987; Pollio, 1983). Particular behaviors meant to invoke this mechanism include joking to fit in, joking around socially, and parody (relying on a shared view of a known form, such as a film genre).

These broadly defined mechanisms may be found to manifest in a variety of ways in the mass media. Although some attempts have been made at typologizing mediated humor (e.g., Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004), there is no consensus as to the number or types of humor utilized in mass media products (Vandaele, 2002).

Research by Neuendorf, Skalski, and others (Lieberman et al., 2009; Neuendorf with Fennell, 1988; Neuendorf, Skalski, & Powers, 2004) has established the validity of a multi-dimensional approach to the measurement of senses of humor (SOH). Additionally, links between specific SOH profiles and media use patterns have been established (Neuendorf, 2007; Neuendorf & Skalski, 2000; Powers et al., 2005), as well as links connecting SOH to perceived quality of life (QOL; Neuendorf et al., 2000). The four SOHs have been found to predict social values (Johnson et al., 2012; Skalski et al., 2012). And, some evidence has been found of a relationship between SOH profiles and reactions to public events—i.e., public opinions (Neuendorf et al., 1999; Neuendorf et al., 2011).

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The four humors "black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, and blood" were a main belief in medical theory up until the 19th... When I think about these humors in this sense, humoral theory makes a lot more sense to me. I know that with metabolic and genetic illnesses, a lot of it has to do with how cells function or dysfunction. SteamLouis. The Four Humors are responsible for the nutrition, growth and metabolism of the organism. They originate in the digestive process. In Greek Medicine, digestion happens in four stages: The First Digestion happens in the gastrointestinal tract, and produces chyle; its waste product is the feces, or stool. The Second Digestion happens in the liver, and produces the Four Humors. Its wastes are eliminated via the bile, urine and sweat. The Third Digestion happens in the blood vessels, and feeds the principal organs of the body. Its wastes are eliminated via the urine and sweat. The Fourth Digestion