

English 102
Final Exam
Fall 2005- 2006

WHY WE LAUGH

By Janet Spencer

Are you a quiet giggler? Or can you let loose with hearty laughter? Your ability to laugh may mean more than you think.

1 Picture this cartoon: A man is watering his lawn just as an attractive blonde walks by. As he ogles¹ her, he accidentally turns the hose on his dowdy² wife, who is sitting on the porch.

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for the difference in opinion.

3 We start finding things laughable or not laughable early in life. An infant first smiles at approximately eight days of age. Many psychologists feel this is his first sign of simple pleasure food, warmth and comfort. At six months or less, the infant laughs to express complex pleasures

4 In his book *Beyond Laughter*, psychiatrist Martin Grotjahn says that the earlier an infant begins to smile and laugh, the more advanced is his development. Studies revealed that children who did not develop these responses (because they lacked an intimate,

5 Between the ages of six months and one year, the baby learns to laugh for essentially the same reasons he will laugh throughout his life, says Dr. Jacob Levine, associate professor of psychology at Yale University. Dr. Levine says that people laugh to express mastery over an anxiety. Picture what happens when a father tosses his child into the air. The child will probably laugh but not the first time. In spite of his

him? Once the child realizes he will be caught, he is free to enjoy the game. But more importantly, says Dr. Levine, the child laughs because he has mastered an anxiety.

6 Adult laughter is more subtle, but we also laugh at what we used to fear. The feeling of achievement, or lack of it, remains a crucial factor. Giving a first dinner party is an anxious event for a new bride. Will the food be good? Will the guests get along? Will she be a good hostess? All goes well; the party is over. Now she laughs freely. Her

¹ **Ogles:** stares at in an amorous manner

² **dowdy:** dull, plain, unfashionable

pleasure from having proved her success is the foundation for her pleasure in recalling important one her mastery of anxiety.

7 Laughter is a social response triggered by cues. Scientists have not determined a brain center for laughter, and they are perplexed by patients with certain types of brain damage who go into laughing fits for no apparent reason. The rest of us require company, and a reason to laugh.

8 When we find ourselves alone in a humorous situation, our usual response is to it true that our highest

in a sense, socializing with ourselves. We laugh at a memory, or at a part of ourselves.

9 Practically every philosopher since Plato has written on how humor and laughter are related, but Sigmund Freud was the first to evolve a conclusive theory. Freud

sex and aggression. Jokes, not accidentally, are often based on sex or aggression, or both. We find these jokes funny because they provide a sudden release of our normally suppressed drives. We are free to enjoy the forbidden, and the energy we normally use to inhibit these drives is discharged in laughter.

10 Another reason laughter is pleasurable is because of the physical sensations involved. Laughter is a series of minor facial and respiratory convulsions that stimulates our respiratory and circulatory systems. It activates the secretion of adrenalin and increases the blood flow to the head and brain. The total effect is one of euphoria.

11 frightening situations, such as a fire or an emergency plane landing, frequently intersperse their story of the crisis with laughter. Part of the laughter expresses relief that everything is now all right. During a crisis, everyone mobilizes energy to deal with the potential problem. If the danger is averted, we need to release that energy. Some people cry; others laugh.

12 Part of the integral pleasure of a joke is getting the point. But if the sexual or leave us feeling guilty instead of amused. We may laugh but in embarrassment.

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13 Which brings us to why women may not have found the joke about the man watering his wife very funny because they get the point only too well. Many

sex jokes (a hefty percentage of all jokes) employ women as their target. Women sometimes make poor joke tellers for the same reason; consciously or subconsciously,

14 When we are made the butt of a joke, either on a personal or impersonal level, we are emotionally (pretense). While we are feeling, we cannot laugh. The two do not mix. French essayist relief.

15 Knowing that laughter blunts emotion, we can better understand why we sometimes laugh when nothing is funny. We laugh during moments of anxiety because compulsive laughter is a learned response. If we laugh, it expresses good feelings and the cope, we laugh to reassure ourselves that we *can*

16 How often have we laughed at a funeral or upon hearing bad news? We laugh to deny an unendurable reality until we are strong enough to accept it. Laughter also breaks happen to us. We laugh before giving a big party, before delivering a speech, or while

17 But if we sometimes laugh, in sorrow, more often we laugh with joy. Laughter creates and strengthens our social bonds. And the ability to share a laugh has guided many marriages through hard periods of adjustment.

18 According to Dr. Levin, we can measure our adjustment to the world by our capacity to laugh. When we are secure about our abilities, we can poke fun at our foibles. If we can laugh through our anxieties, we will not be overpowered by them.

19 The ability to laugh starts early, but it takes a lifetime to perfect. Says Dr. a peaceful relationship with himself, throw back his head and laugh.