



what are you
laughing at?



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Summary:

We humans laugh the same, regardless of culture.

We also cry the same, and for the same reasons, like losing a loved one.

But is this actually true?

We humans laugh the same, regardless of culture. We also cry the same, and for the same reasons, like losing a loved one. But is this actually true?

Are all people, regardless of their culture, laughing the same way, or at the same kinds of things? Or even feeling pain the same? Or being affected by the same stimuli in a way that is common across all cultures? By this, I mean, can the same thing make anyone laugh, independent of the culture one is brought up within?

We all know babies laugh, but they also sneeze, fart, get fat, yawn, cry, and so on. Those are direct reactions of a human body to different kind of stimuli. Laughter is no different.



If you hit a baby on his 'little nose', he will start crying, assuming that their genetic makeup allows that. However, there are some human beings who do not feel pain, so you can punch their 'little nose' all day long, but they won't feel a thing.

In the same way, if someone's biology is different (muscular or nervous system damage, for example), it can result in their inability to laugh.

But this does not mean that these 'abnormal' people do not understand the meaning of laughter or pain, or that if one is born with a 'normal' ability to laugh, that he or she will laugh at the same things.



There are direct and indirect ways to trigger laughter in a human being. Direct may be seen by tickling, for example, and due to genetic makeup and cultural flavor, people might react very differently, even with these kinds of direct stimuli. In many cultures, boys resist laughing more than girls, when tickled. One thing is clear: there is no 'laugh center' in the brain.

Even the way we laugh or smile can be widely different. Check out this viral video to see some of the many types of laughter, but be aware that it may (or may not) 'trigger' you to laugh along:



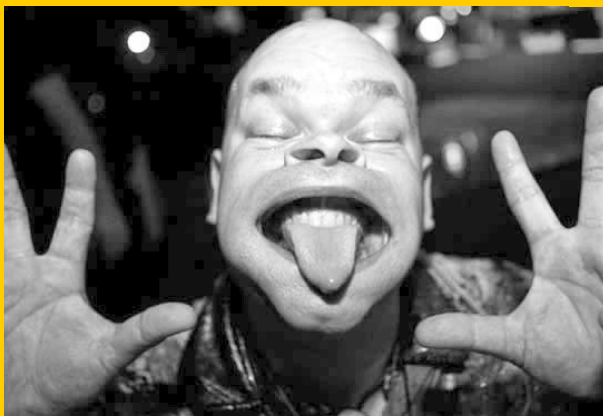
Did you laugh at it? Well, not everyone in the world finds it amusing. As of this writing, eight thousand people had disliked it. If you did, try watching it 100 times and let's see if you're still laughing.

When it comes to indirect triggers of laughter, culture is the only trigger. One might laugh at people that fall, others at cats that are sleeping, and others at people that fart.

Some may not find many things as 'funny', while others may find most things to be hilarious. I ran an internet 'show' for three years, serving funny video compilations before YouTube was well known, and I learned that what makes someone laugh is very subjective. The show had tens of thousands of hits per episode, but while 95% loved it, 5% hated it. And I get that.

I, for instance, am not amused by 'funny cat videos'... I just don't find cats funny at all and I don't know why, but so many other people laugh at those videos.

All of this shows that these reactions, like laughter, are biological marks of cultural triggers.





If we look at a wide variety of cultures and genetic makeups, it becomes more obvious how people react differently when it comes to laughter or smiling. You may think that smiling resembles a positive feeling (whatever that might be), but in Japan, people sometimes smile when they are confused or angry. "In other parts of Asia, people may smile when they are embarrassed.

Some people may smile at others to indicate a friendly greeting. A smile may be reserved for close friends and family members. Many people in the former Soviet Union area consider smiling at strangers in public to be unusual and even suspicious behavior. In Southeast Asian cultures, a smile is frequently used to cover emotional pain or embarrassment."[\(source\)](#)

Some may smile or laugh when they are angry, which is quite opposite the reaction that many of us are used to.

Most people believe that facial expressions project the same type of feeling across all cultures, but a recent study shows this to not be true at all. Take a tribe that has barely been influenced by our 'modern' world, show them six photos of six distinct facial expressions, and then ask them to categorize them.

This experiment was done and, instead of the 'normal' way of categorizing 6 photos in 6 categories as we 'modern' tribals do, they created many different piles, some containing more than one photo. The researchers then played audio recordings of emotional reactions and the same thing happened – the same sound appeared joyful to some and more negative to others.([source](#))

The same goes for (likely) any kind of emotions. They are triggered by the culture one is raised in. From facial expressions to what different feelings relate to, there is no scientific study to show a consistent pattern of behavior or interpretation of such feelings among human cultures.

HERE'S A GREAT VIDEO EXPLAINING THIS PRETTY WELL:



Tickling (or laughter alone) can change from a pleasure state, to a pain feeling, if you tickle someone for half hour, or if someone laughs for an hour. The distinction as to how we define pleasure or pain has no finite borders, and both notions are almost impossible to properly define. Sure, we could probably describe the way muscle act in some states of laughter, or during crying/sadness/pain, but none of these reactions can be properly defined. It is no one way to cry, or laugh, or to express any kind of pleasure or pain.

There's a very interesting documentary about pleasure and pain that explains these concepts in detail, and how environment changes these feelings even from the day we were born. You can watch it [here](#) for free.

One may find pleasure in reading a book in a quiet place, and/or one may find pleasure in dancing in a noisy, crowded place. Others may experience those same scenarios as painful (literally). Of course, we may find some 'natural' reactions that are similar across many people, such as if we tickle them they may laugh (but not all, and not in the same way), or if we cut their toes they may scream and cry (but not all, and not in the same way), but this is not in the realm of 'behavior'. This is a sneeze-like reaction of the body, of one's biology.

It's true that it's hard to think of all of the kinds of pleasures or pains that a human can experience, but showing emotions like 'happiness expressed through laughter' as being culturally influenced, and quite diverse from culture to culture, provides a good example of how even the most powerful of emotions can be culturally influenced or created.

That being said, there is no 'one set of behaviours' that are alike across cultures, when it comes to how people laugh, what they laugh at, or even the way one may feel or interpret pain or other types of emotions.





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