



Ha!: The Science of When We Laugh and Why

By Scott Weems

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An entertaining tour of the science of humor and laughter

Humor, like pornography, is famously difficult to define. We know it when we see it, but is there any way to figure out what we really find funny? In this fascinating investigation into the science of humor and laughter, neuroscientist Scott Weems uncovers what's happening in our heads when we giggle, guffaw, or double over with laughter. Beginning with the premise that humor arises from inner conflict in the brain, Weems explores such issues as why surprise is so important for humor, why computers are terrible at recognizing what's funny, and why cringe-worthy stereotypes make us laugh the hardest. From the role of insult jokes to the benefit of laughing for our immune system responses, *Ha!* reveals why humor is so idiosyncratic, and why how-to books alone will never help us become funnier people. Packed with the latest research, amusing anecdotes (and even a few jokes), *Ha!* is a delightful tour of why humor is so important to our daily lives.

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Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

Here's an interesting idea: humor (and what the author calls its "most common symptom," laughter) is a consequence of having a brain that relies on conflict. Weems, a neuroscientist, explores what goes on inside our cranium when something makes us laugh; he also explores the essence of humor itself (Why can we tell when something's funny, but a computer cannot?), why we laugh longer and harder at some things than we do at others, and how a healthy sense of humor can help us have a healthy body. If, as the author suggests, humor results from conflict in the brain, then certain things follow from that: we laugh loudest at stereotypes because we know on some level that they're wrong, even if we find them amusing; we cackle when we're surprised because our perceptions have been suddenly altered. Considering its subject, the book is a bit dry, but then it's not a humor book; it's a serious book about the neuroscience of humor. --David Pitt

Review

"[A] fascinating new book.... Weems makes the argument that jokes have deep sources in our human needs and psychologies. Human life is complex, not simple, although we have simple needs (food, sex, safety, sleep, friendship, etc.). Humor is a response to inevitable conflict. The humor isn't in the joke; it is in the attitudes of those telling and hearing the joke. The same joke will be funny sometimes to some people and entirely fail to rouse a response to different people at different times."

—Alva Noë, **NPR's 13.7 blog**

"Weems's central idea is that humor and laughter are by-products of the complex workings of the brain, rather than a separate function seated in some funniness control center. Drawing on both current neuroscience research and amusing anecdote, the author steers clear of reductionism and builds his case that humor is more diffuse and complex than other emotions and perceptions."

—*The Scientist*

"In *Ha!*, cognitive neuroscientist Scott Weems analyzes how the punchline of a great joke, like a mini 'eureka!' moment, takes us by surprise and reframes our thinking. Humor, Weems argues, draws on our appetite for solving problems and helps us establish some order in a disordered world.... [I]lluminate[s] the inner workings of humor with a verve that befits the subject."

—*Psychology Today*

"Mirth, points out cognitive neuroscientist Scott Weems, is still something of a conundrum—but one well worth cracking. His journey through the jovial looks in turn at what it is, what it is for and why we should cultivate it."

—*Nature*

"Neuroscientist Scott Weems applies the scientific method to the human funny bone to find out what makes us laugh. He discovers that laughter is one way the brain deals with the discomfort of a particularly inappropriate joke, or the surprise of an unexpected punchline."

—*Discover*

"[A] stimulating overview of what researchers have learned about why we laugh."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Weems renders extensive research accessible for a wide audience.... Humor is a difficult, subjective topic of study, and while Weems doesn’t present major conclusions, the information is interesting and the commentary insightful.”

—***Publishers Weekly***

“Weems, a neuroscientist, explores what goes on inside our cranium when something makes us laugh; he also explores the essence of humor itself (Why can we tell when something’s funny, but a computer cannot?), why we laugh longer and harder at some things than we do at others, and how a healthy sense of humor can help us have a healthy body.”

—***Booklist Online***

"Move over, Henri Bergson, Weems explains the science of laughter way more charmingly. Our neurons are still cracking up."

—**Thomas Cathcart and Daniel Klein, authors of *Plato and a Platypus Walk Into a Bar***

"Scott Weems' *Ha!* is an excellent, non-technical and engaging introduction to the field of humor studies and a much needed book.... Clear, entertaining, and full of personal anecdotes that enliven the discussion."

—**Salvatore Attardo, Dean of Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts, Texas A&M University, and editor-in-chief of *Humor***

“Scott Weems' book *Ha!* is a superb explanation of humor that is simultaneously entertaining and informative. I enjoyed every page, and at the end came away with new insight into what really makes things funny.”

—**James A. Reggia, Professor of Computer Science, University of Maryland**

About the Author

Scott Weems received a PhD in cognitive neuroscience from UCLA, and an MFA in creative writing from Lesley University. Previously a research scientist at the University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Language, he lives in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

William Grimm:

The book *Ha!: The Science of When We Laugh and Why* can give more knowledge and also the precise product information about everything you want. Why then must we leave a very important thing like a book *Ha!: The Science of When We Laugh and Why*? Several of you have a different opinion about book. But one aim in which book can give many facts for us. It is absolutely right. Right now, try to closer with your book. Knowledge or data that you take for that, you can give for each other; you could share all of these. Book *Ha!: The Science of When We Laugh and Why* has simple shape however, you know: it has great and big function for you. You can look the enormous world by wide open and read a publication. So it is very wonderful.

Gary Ackley:

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Betty Borgen:

Reading a book for being new life style in this calendar year; every people loves to learn a book. When you study a book you can get a wide range of benefit. When you read publications, you can improve your knowledge, because book has a lot of information in it. The information that you will get depend on what sorts of book that you have read. In order to get information about your study, you can read education books, but if you want to entertain yourself you are able to a fiction books, these kinds of us novel, comics, in addition to soon. The Ha!: The Science of When We Laugh and Why provide you with a new experience in reading a book.

Elaine Sitz:

What is your hobby? Have you heard which question when you got scholars? We believe that that problem was given by teacher to the students. Many kinds of hobby, Every individual has different hobby. So you know that little person just like reading or as examining become their hobby. You have to know that reading is very important in addition to book as to be the thing. Book is important thing to increase you knowledge, except your own teacher or lecturer. You see good news or update with regards to something by book. Numerous books that can you choose to adopt be your object. One of them are these claims Ha!: The Science of When We Laugh and Why.

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