

**THE POWER OF A
JOKE**





A joke is a display of humour in which words are used within a specific and well-defined narrative structure to make people laugh and is usually not meant to be interpreted literally.



A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF HUMOUR THEORY

1. Humour is both universal and particular
2. Humour is social and anti-social
3. Humour is simultaneously mysterious and understandable

Billig, M. (2005). *Laughter and ridicule: Towards a social critique of humour*. Sage



A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF HUMOUR THEORY

- Incongruity theory
- Relief/Release Theory
- Superiority theory



Friedman, H. H., & Friedman, L. W. (2019). LAUGHING MATTERS: When Humor is Meaningful. *Available at SSRN 3418980.*



WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF HUMOR?

Positive Humor	Negative Humor	General Humor
Disagree Compliment Self Self-disparaging/ Compliment partner Bonding humor	Down-putting partner Down putting task or other	Light humor ^a Tension release Nonverbal humor Laughing along Other humor
^a Light humor = Puns, canned jokes, anecdotes, or playful comments		

Dunbar, N. E., Banas, J. A., Rodriguez, D., Liu, S. J., & Abra, G. (2012). Humor use in power-differentiated interactions. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, 25(4), 469–489. doi:10.1515/humor-2012-0025.



CANNED JOKES



I went to the Seminar Series on Equal Opportunities.
It was great! It was as good as the last two
combined.



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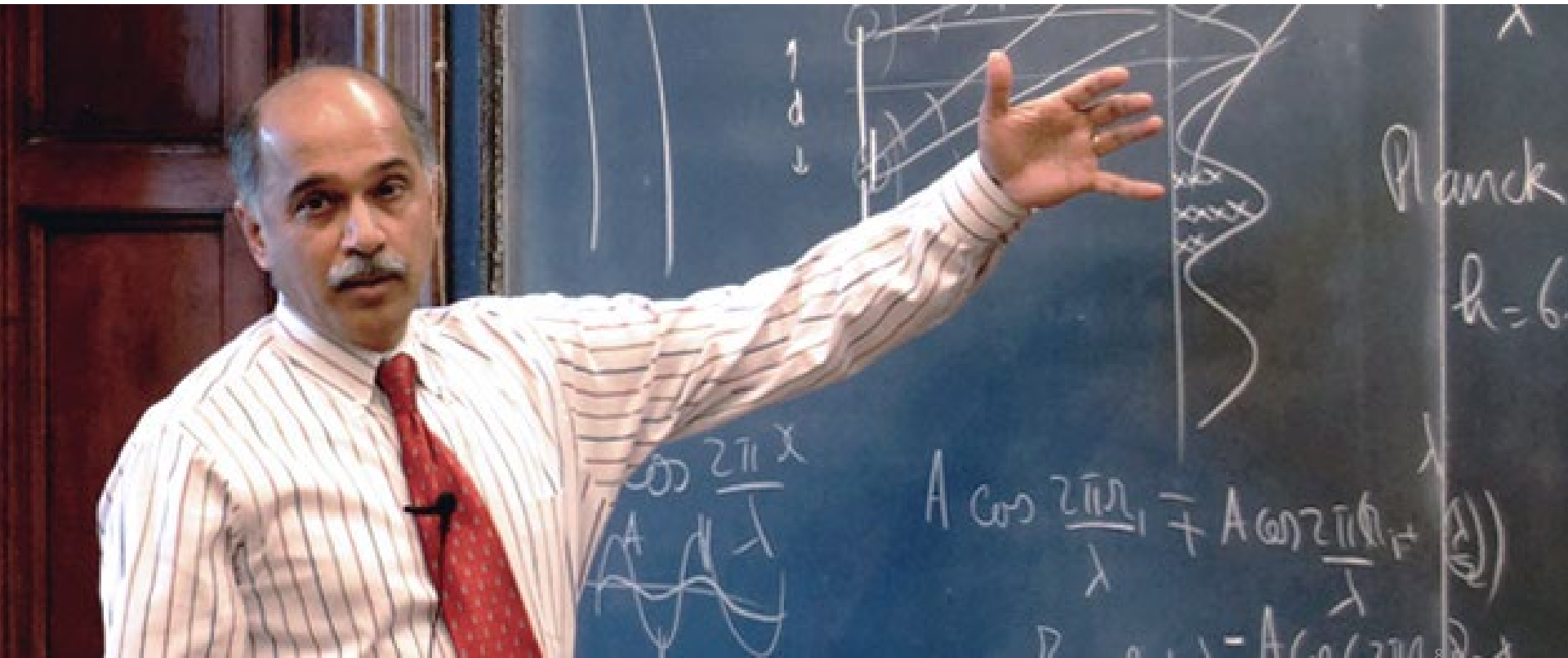
NORMS

- Another instance: when I was younger, someone said to me that in not shaving my legs I was “making a feminist statement.” Not to go along with an expectation, you are making a statement. (Ahmed, 2016, p. 56)
- Collective expectations for and understandings of appropriate and desired behaviour (Anderson et al., 2010, p. 366).
- A norm is also a way of living, a way of connecting with others over or around something (Ahmed, 2016, p. 43)

Ahmed, S. (2016). *Living a feminist life*. duke university Press.

Anderson, M. et al. (2010) Extending the Mertonian Norms: Scientists' Subscription to Norms of Research, *The Journal of Higher Education*, 81:3, 366-393

Lecture jokes



Analysis

Discourses are ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society. (Hall, 1997)

Johansson, A., & Berge, M. (2020). Lecture Jokes: Mocking and Reproducing Celebrated Subject Positions in Physics. In *Physics Education and Gender* (pp. 97-113). Springer, Cham

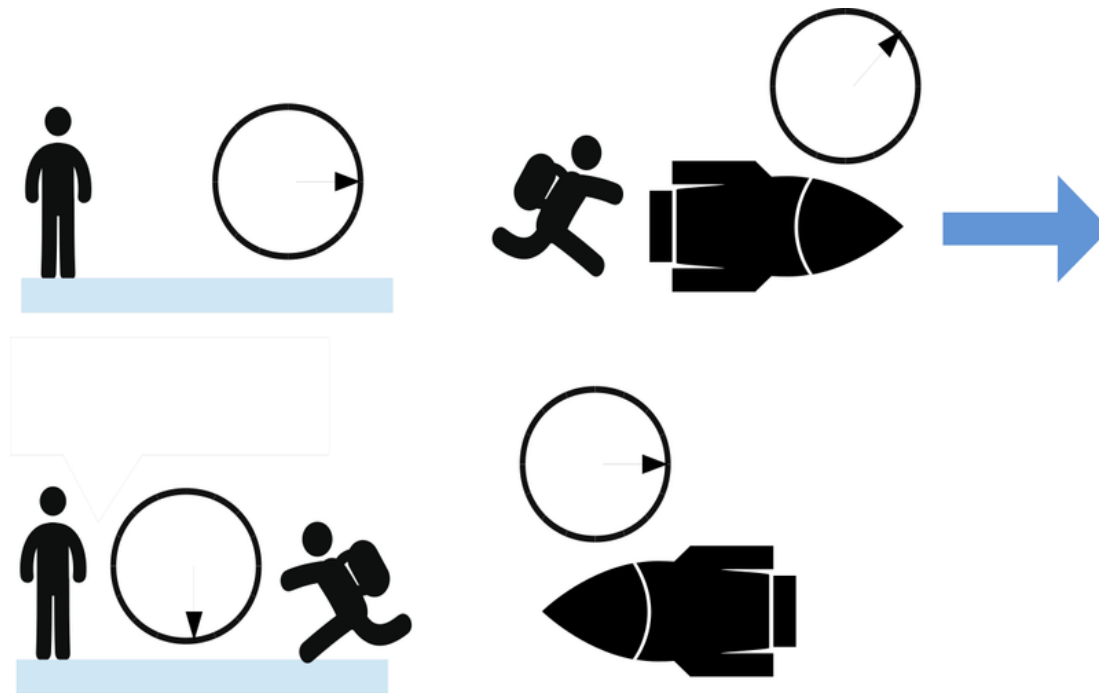


Overview of data collection

Material	Jokes	Courses	Classes	Teachers
List of quotes from R. Shankar	111	1?	unknown	1
Observations of quantum physics classes at two Swedish universities	53	3	29	5
Observations of various classes at two Master's programmes in physics at two Scandinavian universities	13	5	7	5

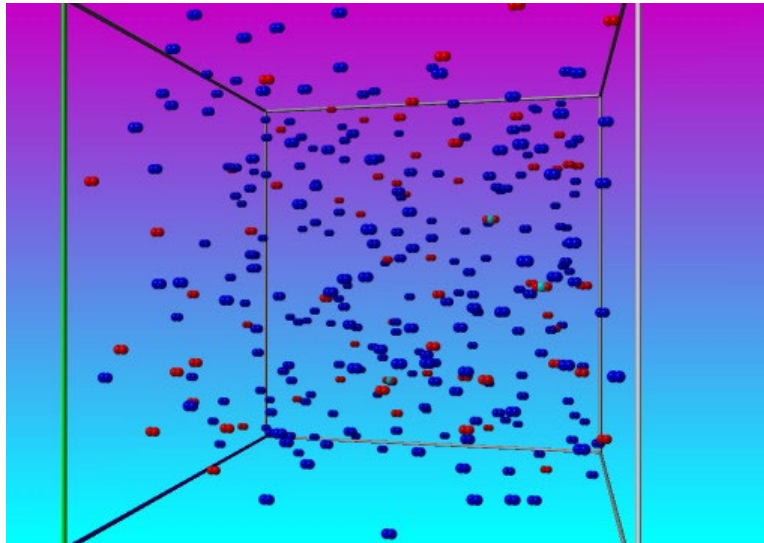


Results

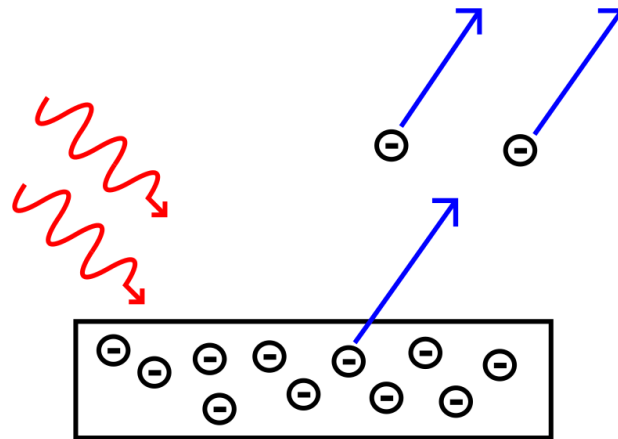


Physics content

'If I could tag the air molecules – this is Joe, Joe, what are you doing?
Generally, Joe is just going back and forth'



The situation of learning physics



‘So, this was pretty easy. For this simple derivation he received the Nobel Prize in 1921 ... No, there were some other things as well’



Physics identity

‘This is a very important day. You can forget your birthday, forget anniversaries, but you need to remember this day, because this is the day that you will learn Newton's Laws.’



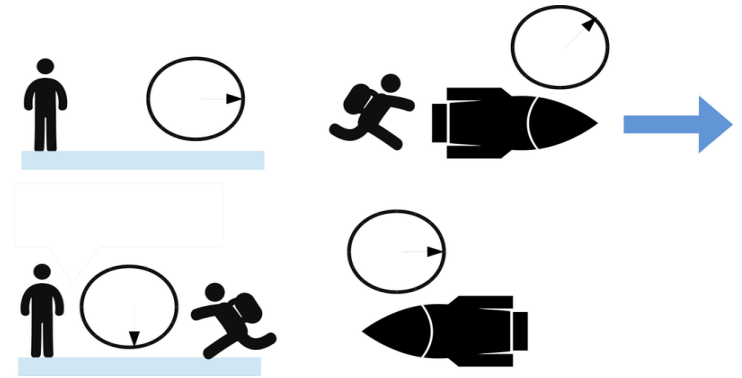
$$\sum \mathbf{F} = 0 \Leftrightarrow \frac{d\mathbf{v}}{dt} = 0$$

$$\mathbf{F} = m\mathbf{a}$$

$$\mathbf{F}_A = -\mathbf{F}_B$$



Conclusions



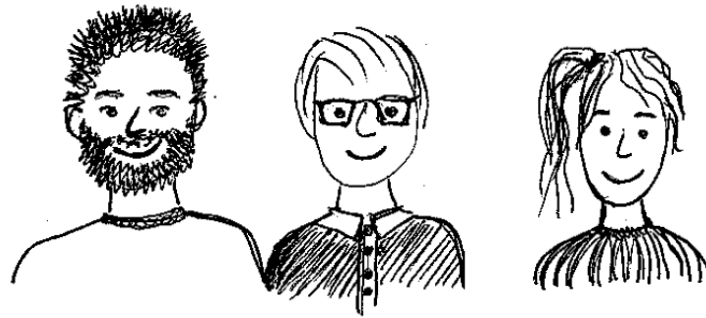
- Similarities in physics jokes across contexts
- No demeaning jokes

BUT:

- Lecture jokes mirror norms in physics
- This reproduces a picture of physicists and physics that may work to exclude some students



HUMOUR IN LIFE SCIENCE



Kobayashi, S., & Berge, M. (2022). Learning norms of science through laughter: a study of humour in life science supervision. *International Journal of Science Education*, 1-20.



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HUMOUR IN LIFE SCIENCE

MS: Next week is better, I mean, from now on, except for the fact that in week seven I am on holiday, then things are much better now. Life is easier, I hope

PhD2: **hehe**

MS: Hahahaha, maybe optimistic

CS: You always say that **hehe**

MS: ja, I know, I'm optimistic by nature

CS: **hehe**

PhD2: **hehe**

Kobayashi, S., & Berge, M. (2022). Learning norms of science through laughter: a study of humour in life science supervision. *International Journal of Science Education*, 1-20.



TAKE HOME MESSAGES

Humour is everywhere

Humour is related to power

Humour is to create a relaxed atmosphere that allows participants to talk freely and openly

Jokes can be difficult to interpret

Let's be careful out there!



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