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

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF HUMOUR THEORY

- Incongruity theory
- Relief/Release Theory
- Superiority theory

WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF HUMOR?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Humor</th>
<th>Negative Humor</th>
<th>General Humor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Down-putting partner</td>
<td>Light humor(^a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliment Self</td>
<td>Down putting task or other</td>
<td>Tension release</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-disparaging/</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nonverbal humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliment partner</td>
<td></td>
<td>Laughing along</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonding humor</td>
<td></td>
<td>Other humor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)Light humor = Puns, canned jokes, anecdotes, or playful comments

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


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)

# Overview of data collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Jokes</th>
<th>Courses</th>
<th>Classes</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of quotes from R. Shankar</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>1?</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations of quantum physics classes at</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two Swedish universities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations of various classes at two Master’s</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>programmes in physics at two Scandinavian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>universities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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’
‘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.’

\[ \sum F = 0 \iff \frac{dv}{dt} = 0 \]

\[ F = ma \]

\[ F_A = -F_B \]
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

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

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!