

# Funny bone offers serious insight into personality

May 11 2018, by Aniruddho Chokroborty-Hoque

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Research linking humour styles and psychology suggests your responses to a joke may provide insight into your personality.

Management and Organizational Studies professor Julie Aitken Schermer, in the first [work](#) of its kind, recently showed a person's genetics, plus the environment around them, might influence the relationship between who they are and what they find amusing.

In other words, you inherit a particular sense of humour from your parents. But your classmates, work colleagues, and individual experiences ultimately shape your humour style.

Schermer's research linking psychology and humour has serious implications. "It's the self-deprecating humour style that I am particularly worried about," she said.

Schermer was one of the world's first researchers to uncover the link between excessive self-deprecating humour and suicidal thoughts, anxiety, depression and borderline personality disorders. Her new work could help counsellors, psychologists, therapists and clinicians treat [mental illness](#) in Canada using humour.

"They could benefit from being more aware of the functions of humour in their patients' lives and how maladaptive humour plays a role in their psychological dysfunctions," she said.

As importantly, Schermer's work reduces the stigma of mental illness by helping to uncover possible biological and environmental explanations for linking humour and mental illness.

Apart from self-deprecating humour, maladaptive humour can also be characterized as aggressive humour and bullying, which often provide devastating experiences for Canada's school-going youth. According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), about 14 per cent of Ontario's high school students indicate a serious level of psychological distress.

Self-deprecating humour often becomes a coping mechanism for bullying.

Schermer plans to work on developing tools school psychologists and academic counselors can use that delve deeper into what patients find funny and use positive humour styles that help ease personal stress and enhance interpersonal relationships.

She hopes these potential psychological tools can also help students cope with mental illness.

"Cognitive behaviour therapy rarely looks at humour as a problem-solving tool," Schermer said. "Instead, counsellors and psychologists tend to focus on what individuals want to complain about."

People are more likely to admit, 'Yes, I find that funny,' than to speak negatively about colleagues – what they laugh at can speak volumes about how they conduct interpersonal relationships.

Counsellors, therapists and clinicians might also be able to help some patients by using [humour](#) as a tool to appreciate something funny and lighthearted around them.

"If you are having a hard day you can either fixate on the negative aspects and criticize yourself, or you can tell yourself something funny and lighten up your own personal mood," Schermer said

Provided by University of Western Ontario

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