

Reducing comedy to an equation

Came across this recently from my Chicago friend, Lyle Dean. No one has been able to accurately define just why something is funny. Up until now! Funny man Alastair Clarke has broken the code. Throw away that seltzer bottle. Grab a probability calculator! Here, for the first time ever, is THE SECRET OF COMEDY.

A new theory suggests an equation for identifying the cause and level of our responses to any humorous stimuli: $h = m \times s$.

The theory argues that human beings are more reliant for their behavioural instruction on culturally inherited information than any other species, and that the accuracy of that information is therefore of unparalleled importance. Yet the individual is exposed to the continual threats of error and deception, which can seriously affect their chances of survival and success.

To compensate, humour rewards us for seeing through misinformation that has come close to taking us in. The pleasure we get (h) is calculated by multiplying the degree of misinformation perceived (m) by the extent to which the individual is susceptible to taking it seriously (s).

Humour therefore exists to encourage us to take information apart and to reject that which is unsound and could potentially harm our prospects. Every time we laugh, we have successfully achieved this, resolving inconsistencies in the fabric of our knowledge as we do so.

"I am not attempting to claim that we each engage in an algebraic equation before we find something funny," says the author, Alastair Clarke, "but that this schematic description reflects the instantaneous reactions of the brain to potentially dangerous misinformation."