

# Why Are Things Funny And Why Do We Laugh? (Pt. 2)

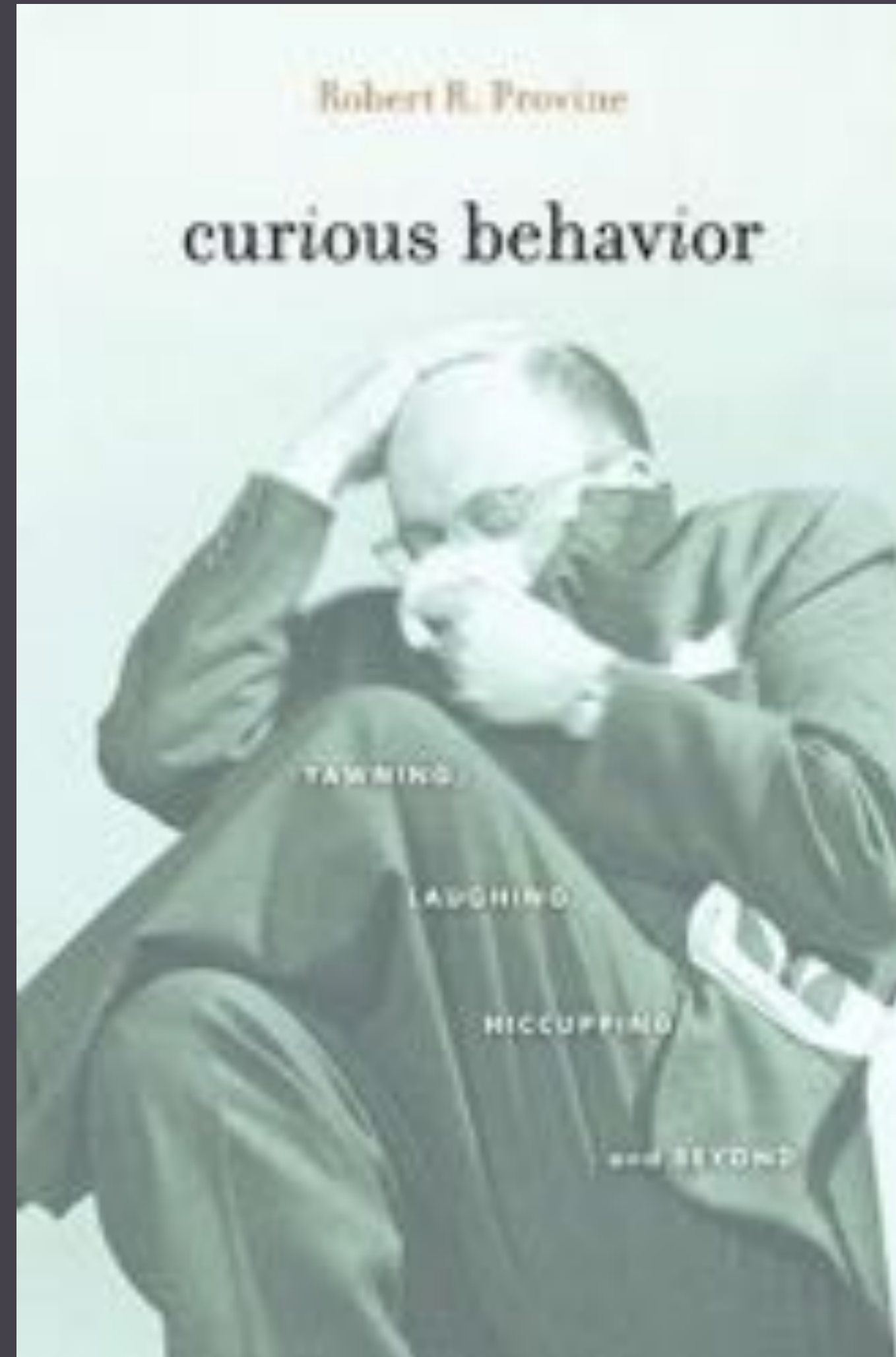
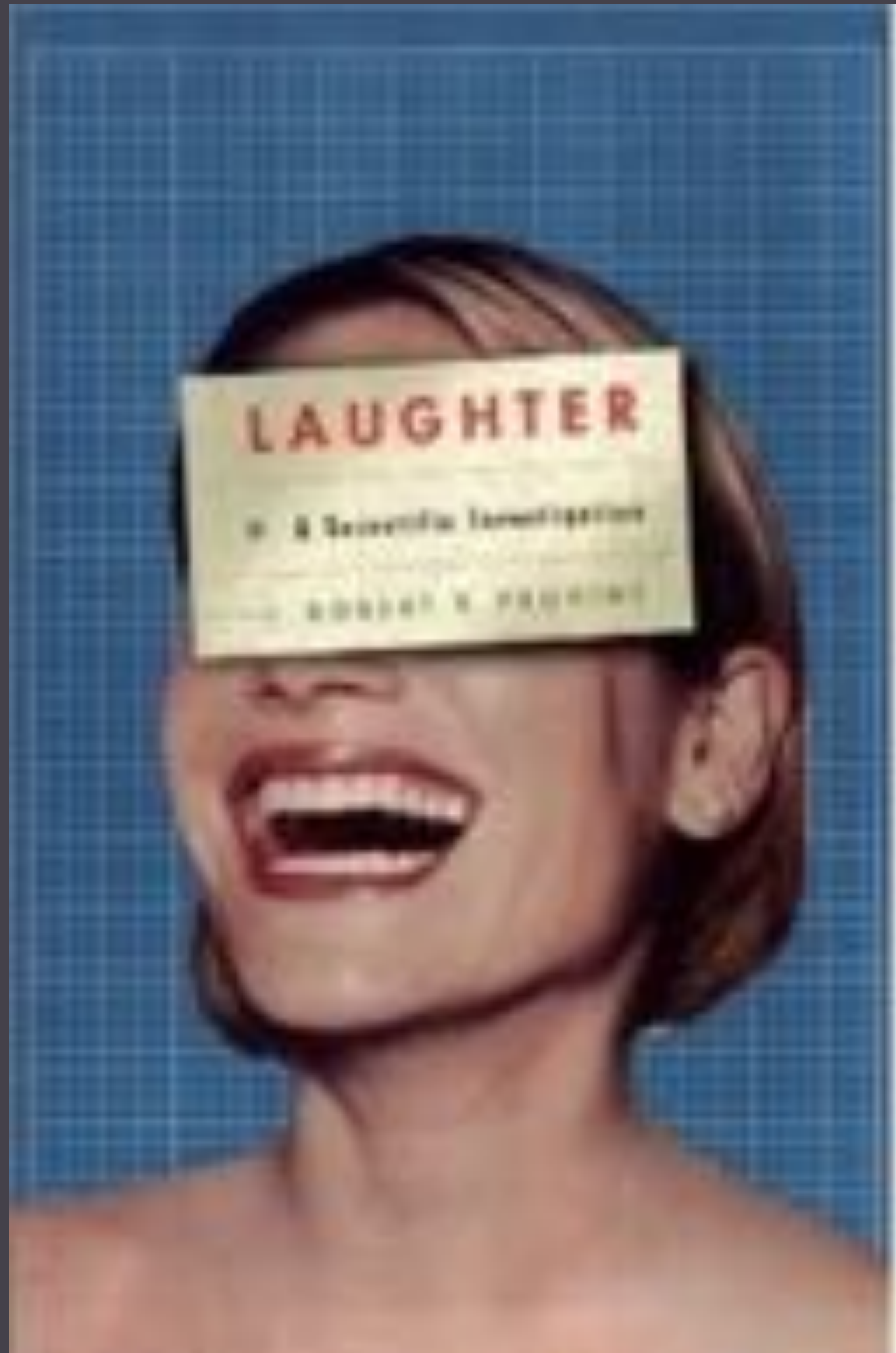


PSYCH 1101: DAY 36

PROF. DAVID PIZARRO  
[CORNELLPSYCH.NET](http://CORNELLPSYCH.NET)

**Reminder:  
Final Exam  
Saturday December 9 @ 2:00 pm  
Barton Hall**

- Exam Format:
  - 60 total multiple choice questions
    - 45 questions from the chapters and lectures since the last prelim (i.e., just a 3rd prelim)
    - 15 questions covering cumulative information
- You have a lot more time, and the review sheet will cover most of the cumulative info
  - Literally, on the review sheet I will give you 20 things to know for the cumulative portion, and will ask about 15 of them. You will get these if you just know the topics on the list!



# Provine's Naturalistic Studies

- Provine and RAs went to local malls and city sidewalks and recorded what happened *just before* people laughed.
- Over a **10-year period** they studied over 2,000 cases of naturally occurring laughter.
- Women laughed more than men
  - UNLESS men are listening to a woman
- The talker laughs 50% more than the listener
- MOST laughter doesn't follow jokes, or any real attempt at humor



# Typical Pre-Laugh Comments (=90%)

- I'll see you guys later
- Look, it's Andre!
- Are you sure?
- I know!
- How are you?
- I try to lead a normal life
- Does anyone have a rubber band?

# "Humorous" Pre-Laugh Comments (= %10)

- Poor boy looks just like his father
- You smell like you've had a good workout
- Did you find that in your nose? [reference to dormitory food]
- He has a job holding back skin in the operating room

Why Are Things Funny?

# Theories Of Humor

1. Incongruity
2. Superiority
- 3. Benign Violation**

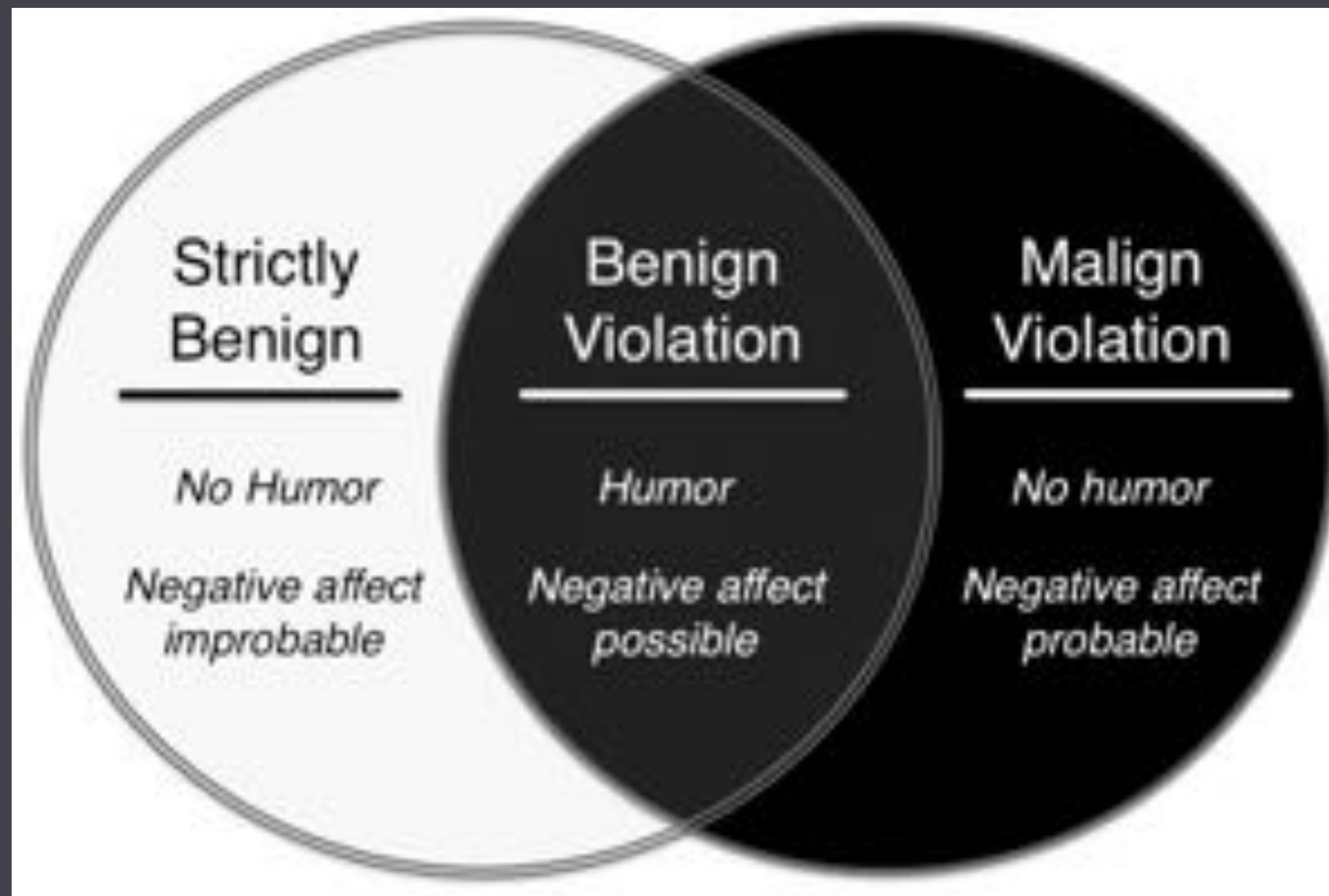


The  
Humor  
Code



*A GLOBAL SEARCH FOR WHAT  
MAKES THINGS FUNNY*

Peter McGraw and Joel Warner



# 4. Tension-Release

- Philosopher John Morreall:
  - human laughter may have its biological origins as a kind of shared expression of relief at the passing of danger
- We laugh when something builds up tension then relieves it

# Theories Of Humor

1. Incongruity
2. Superiority
3. Benign Violation
4. Tension Release

- But while these theories (sort of) capture a *description* of humor, they are not good *explanations*



# Scientific Explanation



STEVEN PINKER

"A satisfying explanation invokes principles that are fewer in number, more general, earlier in the causal chain, and closer to irreducible physical and mathematical laws than the ones that immediately fit the data in question."

# Evolutionary Roots Of Laughter?



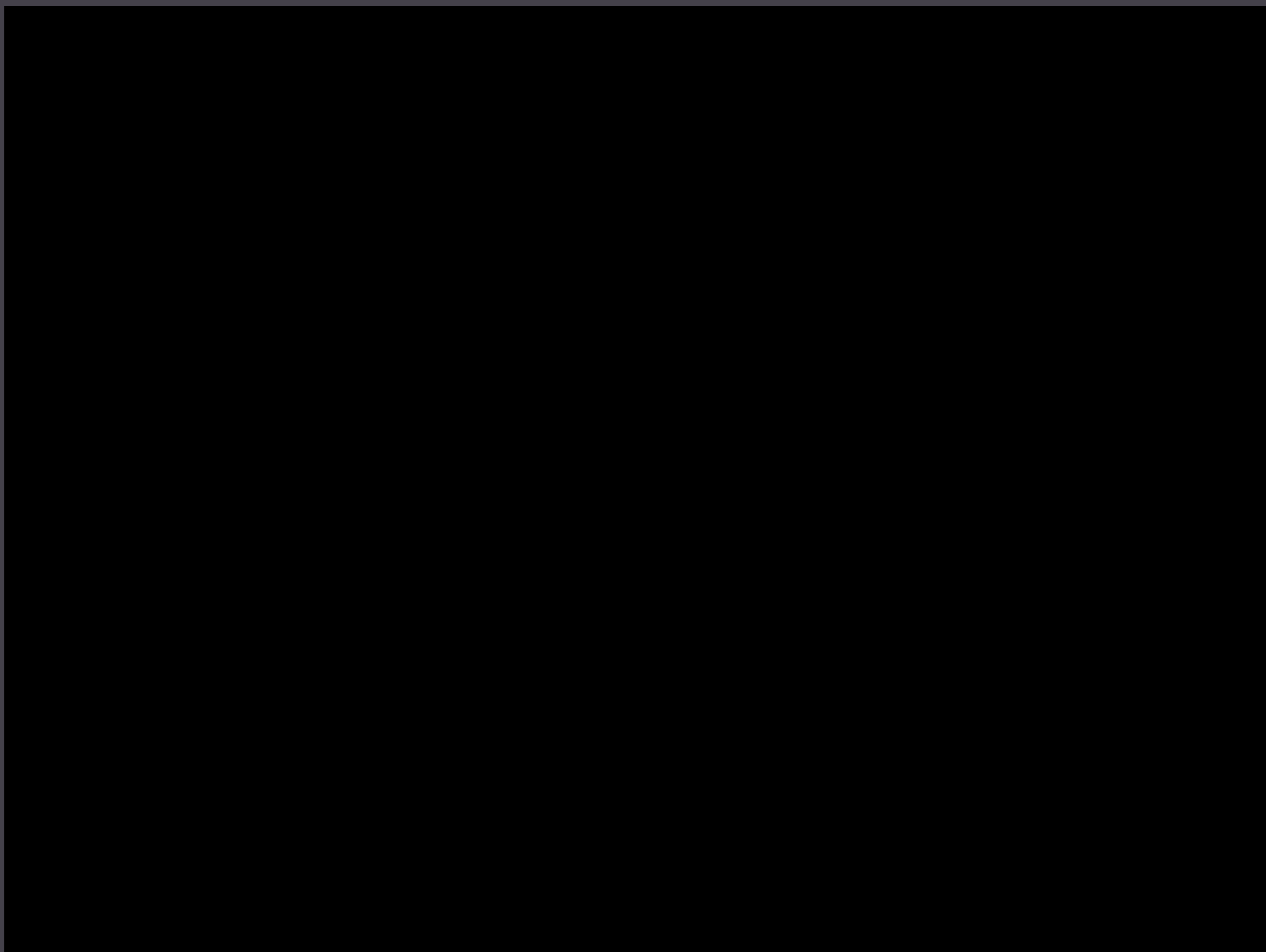
**HENRI BERGSON**

“Man is the only animal who laughs”



# Panksepp's Rats

- Rats chirp while they play, again in a way that resembles our giggles.
- When rats are playfully tickled, they chirp and bond socially with their human tickler.
- Rats seem to like it, seeking to be tickled more.
- “Chirpy” rats also prefer to hang out with other chirpers

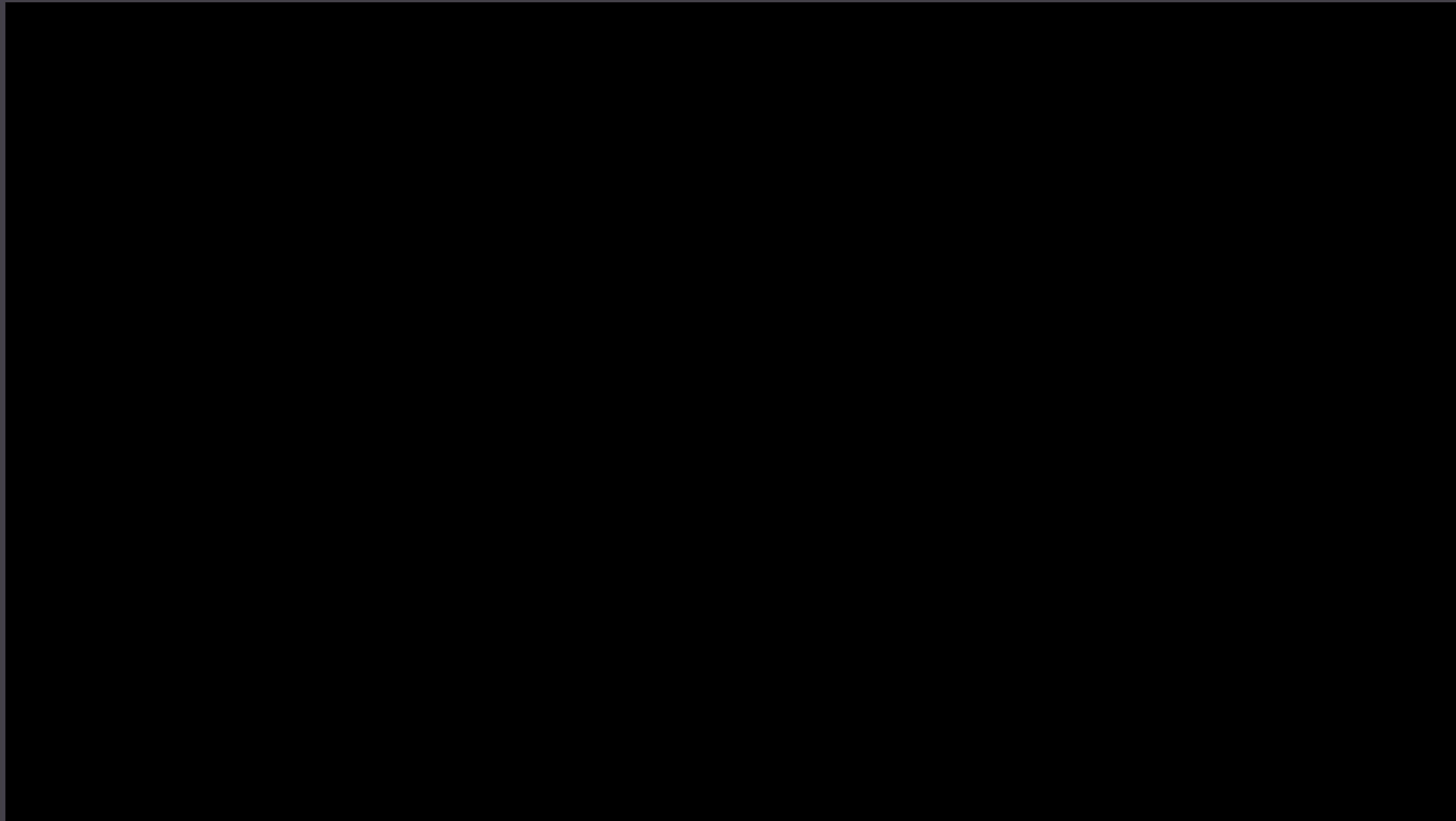


[HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=QOBKLTm5I2Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOBKLTm5I2Y)

# More Likely To Find An Answer In Other Primates

- Humans seem to share laughter with other non-human primates
  - When chimps play and chase each other they produce a sound similar to human laughter
  - laughter-like sounds in monkeys when they attack a common enemy
  - laughter-like sounds in chimpanzees when they tickle each other

# Laughing Chimp



[HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=\\_KCGKVBSSYK](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_KCGKVBSSYK)

# Theories Of Humor

1. Incongruity
2. Superiority
3. Benign Violation
4. Tension-Release
5. Play/Mock Aggression theories



“Tragedy is when I cut my finger.”

MEL BROOKS





MEL BROOKS

“Comedy is when you fall into an open sewer and die.”

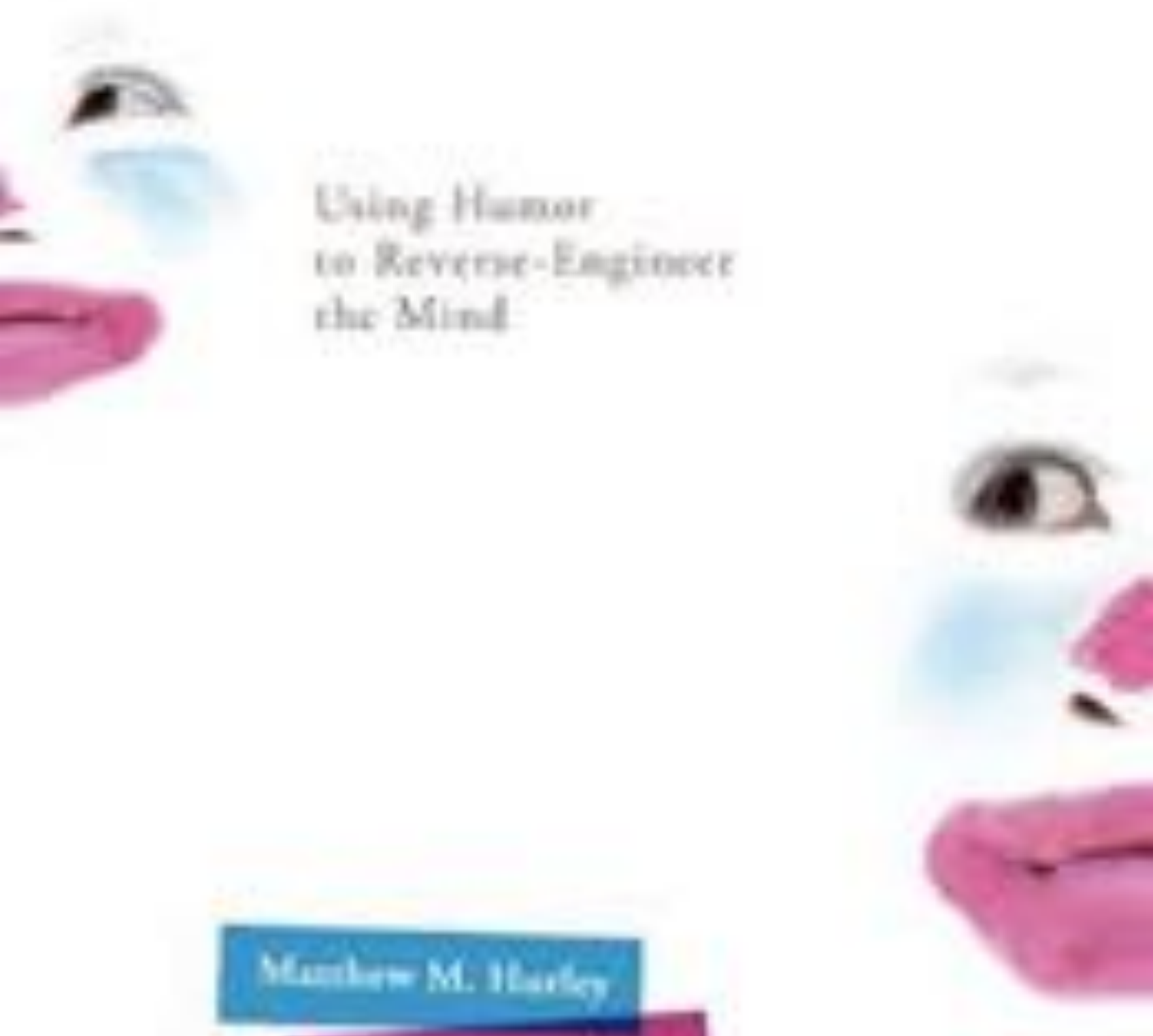




[HTTP://WWW.BBC.COM/FUTURE/STORY/20140131-WHY-DO-WE-LAUGH-WHEN-TICKLED](http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20140131-why-do-we-laugh-when-tickled)



# I·N·S·I·D·E J·O·K·E·S



Using Humor  
to Reverse-Engineer  
the Mind

Matthew M. Harley

Daniel C. Dennett

Reginald B. Adams, Jr.

# Theories Of Humor

1. Incongruity
2. Superiority
3. Benign Violation
4. Tension-Release
5. Play/Mock Aggression theories
6. Humor as brain-debugger

# An Evolutionary Account Of Humor

- We often see the world with a fixed point-of-view--we commit too early to a particular perspective.
  - *We believe things quickly*
- There is good reason to shake this rigidity--to re-evaluate things from a different perspective.
  - *Brain corrects itself, admit to being wrong about initial belief*
- Natural selection favors this by rewarding us with a shot of dopamine.
  - sex
  - food

# Combining Play + Debugging

- Offers explanation
- Covers much of the descriptive work
  - Incongruity
  - Superiority/Ridicule/Violation
  - Social function/release of tension



# Concluding Thought

- What would count as good evidence?
- Could you design an experiment to test this idea?
- Is there a novel prediction that emerges from these theories that can show us where to look for support?
- Until then, we have a lot of work to do...