

Is the Right Brain Funnier than the Left Brain?

You probably can recall something funny that happened to you or someone else that had you in stitches of laughter. The mere recall will ignite your humor funny bone and send waves of laughter back out into the universe. If you tried to relate some of these funny events to others, they may generate some polite laughter, but they don't seem to have a clue as to why you would find it so funny. To retain your sense of humor you find yourself saying "... well I guess you had to be there."

The elements of humor are numerous and cross cultural boundaries and at the same time can be defined by cultural and ethnic differences. However, there is one theme that is a humor favorite – the humor and jokes about the opposite sex. **There is no lack of stories, jokes and one-liners to describe the trials and tribulations of trying to understand the opposite sex.**

Also, **some of the best humor is based on the truth of our own life experiences.** While painful at the time, the same event can later become a laughter filled story. While good comediennes know just how to make us laugh at our own experiences, it has been harder trying to figure out how our brain knows when to laugh.

To determine **the source of humor processing**, two neuroscientists, Prabitha Shammi and Donald Stuss created a simple joke with *four* punch line choices. They reasoned that **humor often contains elements of incongruity.** A joke with a set-up story that is followed by a surprising or incongruent punch line becomes something entirely new and funny.

A classic example of incongruous humor comes from the American comedian, **Gracie Allen** of the team George Burns and Gracie

Allen. Here is a typical example of Gracie's humor: *"When I was born I was so surprised I didn't talk for a year and a half."*

In their research Shammi and Stuss tested a joke not for its funniness, but which **punch line would participants find humorous**. Participants were divided into two groups: those with no hemispheric brain damage and those with specific right hemispheric damage. **Those without brain damage were more likely to select the punch line that had an element of incongruity**. Those with right hemisphere damage were more likely to select any of the other three choices and seemed to favor the one with the cartoon-like physical slapstick.

According to Shammi and Stuss, **it's the right brain frontal lobe where the incongruity of humor is processed**. The left hemisphere starts to follow the set-up portion but then gets stopped by the incongruous punch line. The right hemisphere steps in and creates the context, creates a bigger story picture and creates a different perspective. Then the brain goes Oh!, funny ha-ha, or Oh! yuk!

Now does this mean that women who are more in touch with their right brain hemisphere laugh more?

It's more likely that women and men respond to the funny things they share in common, but they are more in tune to the funny things related to their life experiences and personal senses of humor.

But then again, there are those female laughing fits that women seem to be able to sustain longer than men. The source of this condition within the right hemisphere is still unknown, but has been documented.

by Joyce Hansen