

## Finding Your Funny

Parul Tewari

*Student, Department of Psychology, Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi, Delhi*

In the winter of 2017-18, I noticed that I was sad. I realised that the cold weather was making me miserable and awful about everything. I had never felt this way before and was unsure how to even describe what I was feeling. I felt clueless about how to deal with the sadness and melancholy that I was experiencing. A month into 2018, I realised that it was getting worse and it was because of the weather. I was hoping that my mood would get better as the days get warmer. I also knew that eventually things would work out because nothing lasts forever. But such a mere long term reassurance did not change the fact that in that moment of time, I was a sad person and the things around me didn't bring me much joy.

As a psychology student, I had read extensively about sadness and depression, its types, and ways to treat it, both as part of my course and beyond. So, I tried the things one is supposed to try, including sharing my concerns with others, exercising, sticking to a good routine, but nothing worked. I regularly meditated which helped me introspect. Despite this, I could see myself going further downhill with every passing day. I felt powerless and overwhelmed by the sadness around me and I was desperate to find anything that would keep me happy. I very badly wanted to be 'just fine' again.

Taking a little detour from my narrative, I would like to share that humour has always been extremely important to me. It's one of the things I value most in life. I stand by the fact that we take life too seriously. I often worry that people, especially adults, forget to laugh regularly. I think it's important to be able to laugh at one-self and others. I was always the 'funny one' in the group. I liked to laugh and make other people laugh, even if it came at the cost of being ridiculed. I think that the importance of humour in my life also made me more sensitive about being sad. During that time, the one thing that kept me going was humour.

Humour, as depicted in mainstream media, was never something I enjoyed. Part of the reason for this was that my exposure to comedy was limited to slapstick comedy, a genre I'm not particularly fond of due to its incessant sexist nature and overall lack of creativity. However, my fondness for humour in media increased once I discovered my brand of

comedy. I enjoyed watching sketch comedy, stand-up comedy, late night talk shows and a few other forms of unusually funny stuff. This niche genre of comedy is not for everyone, as is evident from the small fan base that consumes such content as opposed to what is considered conventionally funny.

It's very hard to describe the things that made me laugh, even harder to understand why it did so, but the fact remained that it made me laugh. It made me laugh on some of the most difficult days during the winter. There were days when the only thing that made me smile was an absurdist Lonely Island digital short, or a well-crafted joke by John Mulaney on robots, or a bizarre Stefon club, or one of Kristen Wiig's or Kate McKinnon's wacky characters on Saturday Night Live, or parody shows like Documentary Now. I found this stuff hilarious because of the pure talent, creativity and absurdity of it. I tried to introduce a few more people to this type of humour, but it almost always received poorly. People often reacted in a confused way trying to 'find the joke'. But it stopped mattering to me how other people viewed it. These jokes made me laugh, and I realised that that was enough.

This reflection is centred round a phase when everything around me was telling me to be sad, yet, there was a reason why I laughed amidst that. Comedy and humour became my anchor. I was not consuming humorous content as a defence mechanism or as a distraction. It was an active choice to surround myself with a weird, unexplainable and niche form of comedy to remind myself that happiness can come from the strangest of places. It made me realise that happiness is that treasure that is just waiting to be discovered in all of life's turns and twists.

In my pursuit of sketch and stand-up comedy, I also understood the value of the lows in life. Every once in a while, I used to stumble upon an act that bombed and died an awful death with an audience. I drew an interesting parallel from this. Think of it this way, for every 10 jokes that fail, there will be one which will work. Similarly, for every moment I felt dejected, I found this other moment of happiness that made me appreciate how much I needed to laugh. And in that one moment of joy when I was laughing till I

couldn't breathe, I felt that I was recovering. And that honestly felt like the best feeling in the world.

This experience also made me change my perception with respect to others. I realised that people can find joy and happiness from surprising places and it's important to respect that. Most people did not like what I found funny and I did not enjoy mainstream comedy shows and movies. I learned that while I may not enjoy slapstick comedies or shows like Comedy Nights, there are still people who do and I don't get to denounce that. I grew more tolerant of other people's preferences and I extended this new found open mindedness to areas beyond media preferences.

I am pleased to share that I am in a much better place now. I look back on my journey and derive strength from it. I am not the same person that I was before this and I know that I will never be the same person. But maybe that is what growth does to a person. I don't want to be the same person. I would never have discovered so many things and never learnt so many new things had it not been for this. I am a changed person and I will continue to change, continue to explore and continue to laugh. Most of all, I taught myself how to laugh again in a time when it was just easier to be miserable. In closing, I would like to quote a comedian who has made me laugh harder than anyone else, Bill Hader, who said "*If I'm not making you guys laugh, we're all screwed*".