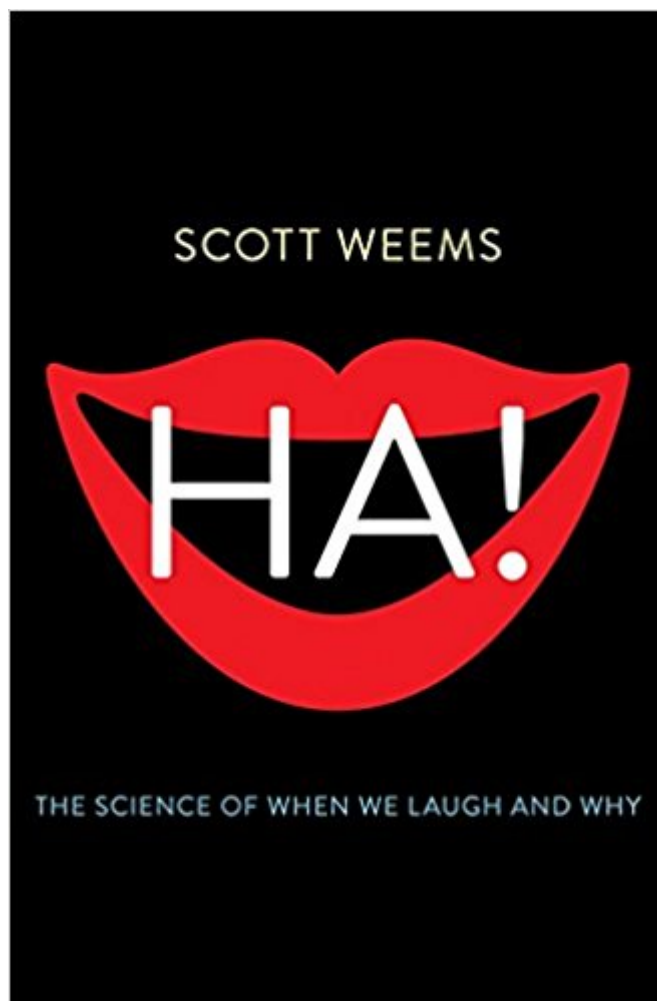


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# Ha!: The Science Of When We Laugh And Why



## Synopsis

Humor, like pornography, is famously difficult to define. We know it when we see it, but is there a way to figure out what we really find funny—and why? In this fascinating investigation into the science of humor and laughter, cognitive neuroscientist Scott Weems uncovers what’s happening in our heads when we giggle, guffaw, or double over with laughter. While we typically think of humor in terms of jokes or comic timing, in *Ha!* Weems proposes a provocative new model. Humor arises from inner conflict in the brain, he argues, and is part of a larger desire to comprehend a complex world. Showing that the delight that comes with “getting” a punchline is closely related to the joy that accompanies the insight to solve a difficult problem, Weems explores why surprise is such an important element in humor, why computers are terrible at recognizing what’s funny, and why it takes so long for a tragedy to become acceptable comedic fodder. From the role of insult jokes to the benefit of laughing for our immune system, *Ha!* reveals why humor is so idiosyncratic, and why how-to books alone will never help us become funnier people. Packed with the latest research, illuminating anecdotes, and even a few jokes, *Ha!* lifts the curtain on this most human of qualities. From the origins of humor in our brains to its life on the standup comedy circuit, this book offers a delightful tour of why humor is so important to our daily lives.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Here’s an interesting idea: humor (and what the author calls its “most common

symptom, laughter) is a consequence of having a brain that relies on conflict. Weems, a neuroscientist, explores what goes on inside our cranium when something makes us laugh; he also explores the essence of humor itself (Why can we tell when something is funny, but a computer cannot?), why we laugh longer and harder at some things than we do at others, and how a healthy sense of humor can help us have a healthy body. If, as the author suggests, humor results from conflict in the brain, then certain things follow from that: we laugh loudest at stereotypes because we know on some level that they are wrong, even if we find them amusing; we cackle when we are surprised because our perceptions have been suddenly altered. Considering its subject, the book is a bit dry, but then it is not a humor book; it is a serious book about the neuroscience of humor. --David Pitt

"[A] fascinating new book.... Weems makes the argument that jokes have deep sources in our human needs and psychologies. Human life is complex, not simple, although we have simple needs (food, sex, safety, sleep, friendship, etc.). Humor is a response to inevitable conflict. The humor isn't in the joke; it is in the attitudes of those telling and hearing the joke. The same joke will be funny sometimes to some people and entirely fail to rouse a response to different people at different times. Alva Noë, NPR, 13.7

"Weems's central idea is that humor and laughter are by-products of the complex workings of the brain, rather than a separate function seated in some funniness control center. Drawing on both current neuroscience research and amusing anecdote, the author steers clear of reductionism and builds his case that humor is more diffuse and complex than other emotions and perceptions. The Scientist "In Ha!, cognitive neuroscientist Scott Weems analyzes how the punchline of a great joke, like a mini "Eureka! moment, takes us by surprise and reframes our thinking. Humor, Weems argues, draws on our appetite for solving problems and helps us establish some order in a disordered world....

[I]lluminate[s] the inner workings of humor with a verve that befits the subject. Psychology Today "Mirth, points out cognitive neuroscientist Scott Weems, is still something of a conundrum but one well worth cracking. His journey through the jovial looks in turn at what it is, what it is for and why we should cultivate it. Nature "Neuroscientist Scott Weems applies the scientific method to the human funny bone to find out what makes us laugh. He discovers that laughter is one way the brain deals with the discomfort of a particularly inappropriate joke, or the surprise of an unexpected punchline. Discover "[A] stimulating overview of what researchers have

learned about why we laugh. — Kirkus Reviews — “Weems renders extensive research accessible for a wide audience.... Humor is a difficult, subjective topic of study, and while Weems doesn’t present major conclusions, the information is interesting and the commentary insightful. — Publishers Weekly — “Weems, a neuroscientist, explores what goes on inside our cranium when something makes us laugh; he also explores the essence of humor itself (Why can we tell when something’s funny, but a computer cannot?), why we laugh longer and harder at some things than we do at others, and how a healthy sense of humor can help us have a healthy body. — Booklist Online “Move over, Henri Bergson, Weems explains the science of laughter way more charmingly. Our neurons are still cracking up.” — Thomas Cathcart and Daniel Klein, authors of *Plato and a Platypus Walk Into a Bar* “Scott Weems’ *Ha!* is an excellent, non-technical and engaging introduction to the field of humor studies and a much needed book. Clear, entertaining, and full of personal anecdotes that enliven the discussion.” — Salvatore Attardo, Dean of Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts, Texas A&M University, and editor-in-chief of *Humor* — “Scott Weems’ book *Ha!* is a superb explanation of humor that is simultaneously entertaining and informative. I enjoyed every page, and at the end came away with new insight into what really makes things funny.” — James A. Reggia, Professor of Computer Science, University of Maryland

This book is so full of great research and information that I will be using it to teach the AATH (Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor) 3 hour graduate humor studies class called The Humor Academy! Thank you Scott for your creatively written book that will be a wonderful resource for all interested in the science of humor and laughter.

I like the theory as explained in this book. Lots of interesting detours, and even funny on occasion! Check it out.

Enjoyable and enlightening.

Decent read. Covers some interesting stuff about how the brain works, with a focus on humor. It’s not a funny book, but the author works in some humor with all that talk about humor

Good book explaining why laughing is good for us.

## I LIKED IT

It's changed my whole perspective on what humor really is; and it has helped me understand people better.

very interesting reading. I did hope for a little more scientific research than the author actually gave the reader.

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