DRAFT LOL: What we can learn from forced laughter *DRAFT*

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The topic of this paper is forced laughter, by which I mean any laughter that does not occur as a spontaneous expression of amusement. Forced laughter, as I use the term, might be deliberate or automatic, and it might occur in a pleasant social situation or under duress. These expressions tend to be overlooked in the humor literature because they are not necessarily responses to humor, and also in the emotion literature, because they do not actually express amusement. I will argue that attending to forced laughter helps us refine our theories of amusement, and applies pressure to conventional theories of emotion. The phenomenon is especially puzzling in cases where we laugh despite it being perfectly clear that nothing was funny. I'll argue that an enactive approach to emotion gives us the best tools for making sense of these cases. Emotions in general change what we can do, and laughter, even in the absence of amusement, changes the affordances of our social environment.

My method is to draw connections between theories of humor and amusement and theories of emotion, and jointly apply these theories to cases of forced laughter. I'll start in section 1 by describing two recent theories of humor that I will appeal to throughout the rest of the paper. Next, in section 2, I'll describe several cases of forced laughter, and connect them to theories of humor. These cases are certainly not comprehensive, but they are diverse, and they will serve as the explananda throughout the rest of the paper. In section 3 I will return to these cases, but this time through the lens of conventional theories of emotion. Conventional theories are those that take emotions to have representational contents with a mind-to-world direction of fit. These theories predominate in both philosophy and psychology, and I will argue that they have difficulty explaining some of the cases of forced laughter. In sections 4 and 5 I will present a brief summary of the enactive theory of emotion from Shargel and Prinz (2018). In section 6 I will apply that theory to the case of amusement, making connections with the theories of humor introduced in section 1. Finally, in section 7 I will describe how this theory of amusement allows for a satisfying explanation of even the most puzzling cases of forced laughter.

1. Theories of Humor and Amusement

McGraw and Warren's (2010) benign violations theory of humor draws inspiration in part from primates, who laugh when tickling each other or play fighting. Their proposal is clear from the name: that amusement arises when we are aware of some sort of violation, but the violation is benign. This clearly fits the non-human primate cases, since during play the primates are under attack, but the attack is not truly threatening. The view makes intuitive sense when applied to human amusement as well. Humor often, perhaps always, involves something gone wrong. Curb

Your Enthusiasm would not be funny if Larry David was consistently respectful of others, and Homer Simpson would not be funny if he had sound judgment. However, when something seems truly terrible to us we do not find it amusing.[1] This raises the question: when is a violation benign?

According to McGraw and Warren (2010), "a violation can seem benign if (a) a salient norm suggests that something is wrong but another salient norm suggests that it is acceptable, (b) one is only weakly committed to the violated norm, or (c) the violation is psychologically distant" (p. 1142). The authors performed experiments to test these conditions where they posed variants of the same scenario in different conditions, and observed whether participants were amused. They tested the conflicting norms condition by posing a scenario where a man rubs a kitten on his genitals (p. 1143). Participants are amused if the kitten enjoys the contact, but not if the kitten does not. In the former case there are conflicting norms, because sexual contact with a cat is a purity violation, but it seems as though no harm is done. They tested norm commitment by posing a scenario where a church raffles off a hummer to gain new members (p. 1145). Only non-churchgoers, who presumably are less committed to the integrity of church activities, find the scenario amusing. Finally, to test psychological distance, they primed participants with either a short or long distance on a Cartesian plane before posing a scenario where someone has sexual contact with a chicken carcass (1146-7). The participants primed with the greater distance were more amused. Notably, the participants in all three of those studies reported disgust with the scenarios, even those who found them amusing.

Noel Carroll's (2013) incongruity theory is quite similar to the benign violation theory, even though the theorists do not seem to have any knowledge of each other. Carroll (2013) presents several conditions for someone to enter what he calls comic amusement, "(1) the object of her mental state is a perceived incongruity (2) which she regards as neither seriously threatening to herself nor anyone she cares about, nor does she regard it as otherwise anxiety producing, (3) which she does not find annoying, (4) which she does not approach with a genuine, puzzle-solving attitude, but (5) which she enjoys" (p. 84). I will not discuss all of those conditions in depth, but two things stand out about them taken as a whole. First, Carroll's incongruities sound a lot like violations. Carroll points out that amusing incongruities may violate norms of logic, manners, language, and good sense, among others (p. 80). I will take 'violation' to be roughly equivalent to 'incongruity' for present purposes.

Second, Carroll's conditions 2-3 essentially state that the violation must be benign. This is another similarity with the benign violation view, and it takes on greater significance if we take amusement to be an emotional state, as Carroll does. On the face of it, it seems odd that we should have a psychological system that picks out benign violations, or non-threatening incongruities. These seem to be arbitrary combinations of features. However, it seems that some

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[1] Deliberately offensive humor may seem to contradict this claim. However, the notion of psychological distance, which I introduce below, helps explain how offensive jokes are still benign to those who find them amusing.

types of emotional episodes can mix together more easily than others. For example, anger seems to mix naturally with disgust, but not with calm. It is difficult, while angry, to become calm, but not to become disgusted. Also, becoming calm will reduce your level of occurrent anger, but becoming disgusted will not. With this in mind, perhaps violations are sufficient for eliciting amusement. The other conditions (must be benign/non-threatening) in both theories are only relevant because violations often also elicit other emotions, such as anxiety, fear, and anger, that are incompatible with amusement.

The benign violations and incongruity theories seem to describe the sources of our amusement. In the next section I will survey a range of cases of forced laughter, using these theories of amusement to provide a first pass of explanation.

2. Forced Laughter

On my view forced laughter is often a form of cooperation: cooperation with the producer of the humor, the person who made the deliberately humorous comment.[2] Humor plays many different social roles, and cooperation with humor-producers can take many different forms. I will present a few cases in this section that will set the agenda for the rest of the paper.

First, humor is often a source of entertainment. The producer of humor may aim to entertain, but it is difficult to be funny at will. Some people are funnier than others, and nobody is always successful when aiming to be funny. Fortunately laughter is contagious. By amplifying your laughter, or even forcing laughter entirely, you increase the impact of genuinely funny comments, and salvage some amusement from comments that would otherwise fall flat. You are essentially creating a laugh-track for your conversation. Imagine by contrast someone who only laughs when something is so amusing that they cannot help it. That person fails to cooperate with producers of humor, and fails to pull their affective weight in their social group.

Second, humor can strengthen social ties. Treger et al (2013) show that humor and liking have a reciprocal relationship with each other. People are humorous with those they like, and when people are humorous with you it tends to make you like them. So, we sometimes produce humor with the aim of demonstrating affection or at least friendliness. The problem, again, is that attempts to be humorous are not always successful. If you only laughed when a comment was genuinely amusing you might appear to reject friendly overtures, and you would allow the joke-tellers to bomb. By laughing, even if you are not amused, you demonstrate that you appreciate the humorous overture, even if it was not actually funny, and you save the joke-teller from embarrassment. These first two functions of forced laughter are compatible. You can laugh both to make a conversation more entertaining and to express appreciation to the joke-teller.

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[2] This view does not fit as neatly with cases where someone forces laughter after their own remark. In section 7 I will present a more detailed view which applies to these cases.

Third, humor can be used to put other people down. McGraw and Warren say that one condition for a violation being seen as benign is if you do not consider the norm violation to be very serious. This is the case with racist or sexist humor, humor used to bully a socially isolated individual, and satirical humor aimed at a social or political opponent. In all of these cases the humor producer lacks concern for the target of the humor, and therefore is not constrained by norms that restrict aggression. We can think of this humor as having at least two roles. First, for those who lack concern toward specific groups or individuals, jokes at their expense are amusing and therefore also entertaining. Second, the fact that the aggressor finds it amusing to put down a group or individual implies a lack of moral concern, so producing derogatory humor can be used to express that lack of concern. Insults are not only hurtful because of the content of the insult, but because of the implied attitude.

That said, insulting humor is not always abusive, and does not always express a malign attitude. Recall the case of two primates playfully fighting. An insult is a sort of attack, but if it is made in a playful manner there is no need to be offended. Nobody would agree to be roasted on television if they expected the insults to be malicious. McGraw and Warren's appeal to psychological distance applies to these cases. An insult is benign if everyone understands that it is not intended to do harm. Part of the appeal of offensive humor is to push the boundaries of psychological distance, to use the conventions of joke-telling to laugh at taboo subjects. A dangerous feature of offensive humor is that bullies and trolls can take advantage of this ambiguity. They can make jokes that express true lack of concern while pretending that it is all just a joke.

With all that said, what is the role of forced laughter in response to insulting humor? We can distinguish two different cases. If you sympathize with the target of the humor, you may pretend that it really was an innocent, harmless joke, allowing the victim to save face. However, another possibility is that you do not sympathize with the target. In that case, by laughing you cooperate with the person who is making the joke. The aim of that person is to insult some target, so by forcing laughter you signal that you agree that the target of the insult is an appropriate target of abuse. Sending this signal is itself an aggressive act toward that target.

I will raise one more category of forced laughter: laughter in the absence of humor. Provine (1993) carried out an ethological study of laughter and its relationship to speech among college students. Several of his findings are striking: speakers laugh more often than their audiences. Laughter almost never interrupts an utterance – instead it serves as a sort of punctuation. There are a number of gender effects: male speakers elicit more audience laughter, and male speakers rarely laugh when speaking to a female audience. Perhaps the most puzzling observation is that only 10-20% of laughter followed remotely humorous comments (pp. 294-5). Typical examples of comments that elicit laughter included, "I'll see you guys later" and "It was nice meeting you too" (p. 294). Provine concludes that, "There is only a partial correlation between the behavioral fact of laughter and the abstract and subjective category of humor. The focus on humor deflects

consideration of broader and deeper roots of laughter in human vocal communication and social interaction" (p. 296).

If Provine is right then my attempt to explain forced laughter through the lens of humor is misguided, or at least severely limited. His data does certainly provide a challenge to my approach. However, divorcing laughter from humor does not resolve the issue. Why do we use laughter, of all things, to punctuate so many non-humorous speech acts? It is hard to see how theories of humor apply to those cases, but it is also hard to explain the role of laughter in these cases without reference to humor. I will present my own explanation of these cases, based on my enactive theory of emotions, in section 7.

3. Emotional Content, Expression, and Deception

Ideally a theory of amusement would mesh with a theory of the social functions of humor, both of those theories would mesh with a theory of forced laughter, and all of those theories would mesh with a general theory of emotions. So far I have drawn connections between amusement, the social function of humor, and forced laughter. They do seem to mesh together so far, with the exception of Provine's cases. The next step is to integrate this mass of theories with theories of emotion. In this section I will present some challenges for conventional emotion theories, before turning to my enactive theory in the remainder of the paper.

On almost all theories of emotion, such as cognitivist and perceptual theories in philosophy, and appraisal theories in psychology, emotions have some sort of representational content. Emotions represent some feature of the world as being a certain way for you: dangerous in the case of fear, beneficial in the case of joy, and so on. These theories differ in how they characterize these representations, but a wide range of theories take emotions to have representational content with a mind to world direction of fit. In fact, almost all prominent theories count as conventional by these standards. While they differ in many significant ways, almost all emotion theorists agree that fear of heights represents proximity to a steep descent as dangerous, and my fear is rational only if that is true.

These theories fit with either the benign violation theory or incongruity theory in a straightforward manner: the emotion of amusement represents its object as being a violation or incongruity, and the object does not elicit any emotions that are incompatible with amusement. The next question is how well those theories of emotion will handle cases of forced laughter. I'll begin with the easiest cases, and move on to progressively greater challenges.

First, sometimes forced laughter is intended to deceive others about whether you are amused. You might pretend to laugh in order to reciprocate a friendly overture. If the humor producer believes you are amused they will be pleased and will have greater confidence in your social bond. If someone makes a joke that is insulting toward its target, you could either laugh to

pretend that the joke was harmless, or to cooperate with the harmful intent of the joke-teller. All of these cases are perfectly compatible with conventional representational theories of emotion, because on these theories emotional expressions such as laughter are reliable, though not infallible, social signals. Through false laughter you pretend to have an emotional response that you do not in fact have.

Contagious laughter provides a moderate challenge. On conventional theories it is only rational to enter an emotional state under epistemic conditions that justify having a state with certain contents. You should only be afraid when you have evidence of danger, or angry when you have evidence that you were wronged. This makes all cases of emotion-induction through physiological changes, such as manipulation of facial expression or emotion perception, problematic (Strack et al. 1988). Perhaps one could argue that perceiving someone else's fear expression is evidence for forming the corresponding judgment. When we perceive fear in others we have evidence of danger, and therefore rationally should enter a state of fear. However, this would be a very weak form of evidence, so these cases are hard to square with conventional theories. James (1922) and Lange (1922) long since observed that these cases are widespread, and it is familiar that a wide range of emotional expressions, not just laughter, are contagious. So, the fact that forced laughter plays the role of inducing laughter in others is, if considered in isolation, problematic for conventional emotion theories. However, it is only one instance of a large, very familiar set of cases, so the marginal problem that contagious laughter presents is small.

The most challenging cases for conventional emotion theories are the ones where forced laughter plays a social role, but where deception or emotional contagion is not essential to that role. I'll discuss two examples, one featuring mockery, and the other featuring laughter punctuation. Conventional theories have a plausible explanation for the former, but not for the latter.

First, imagine that a bully, Brianna, is mocking her target, Taylor. Brianna's insult is insulting, but it is not amusing, even to Brianna and her friends. After all, just because we have a social reason to make a joke does not mean that we can think of a funny one in that moment. Brianna's ally Abigail forces laughter in response to Brianna's joke. Her laughter fools absolutely no one, as she knew it would, but it is a successful social move nonetheless. Brianna feels supported, and Taylor can tell that Brianna and Abigail are ganging up on her.

On conventional theories of emotion, laughter is an expression of amusement. Combined with the benign violation view, laughter expresses the view that the object of amusement is a benign violation. In this case Abigail's laughter is obviously forced, and therefore everyone can tell that it is not actually an expression of amusement. However, by forcing laughter she endorses the joke. This sends the message that Brianna's mockery of Taylor is benign, because Taylor is an appropriate target for aggression. If she had actually laughed spontaneously it would have expressed her judgment that the joke was a benign violation. Abigail uses forced laughter to

deliberately send the message that spontaneous laughter would have expressed. Therefore conventional theories of emotion can handle this sort of case.

In the second case, a few college students are chatting while waiting in line at a campus snack bar. They get their drinks and snacks, and then one says, "I'll see you guys later, ha ha." I'll use the term 'laughter punctuation' for laughter that punctuates totally non-humorous utterances, utterances that are not even intended to be amusing. Provine (1993) observed that this is a very common sort of laughter.

This case is challenging because there is not even a failed attempt at humor. In the mockery case I proposed that forced laughter deliberately sends the same message that spontaneous laughter would have expressed. This allows conventional theories of emotion to be relevant, since on those views laughter expresses amusement, and amusement has representational content. However, spontaneous laughter in this case would not have made sense. Therefore, a view of laughter as expressing some content does not shed any light on this case.

Provine (1993) suggests that we need an account of laughter that does not appeal to humor at all. That might end up being a bullet that emotion theorists need to bite. However, it would be preferable to integrate even these cases into a theory of humor, which is itself integrated into a theory of emotion. In the remainder of the paper I will show that an enactive theory of emotion allows us to do just that.

4. Motoric Enaction

In the next two sections I will summarize the enactive theory of emotions from Shargel and Prinz (2018). We did not apply our theory to amusement in that paper, but I will go on to show that it is well suited to explaining both spontaneous amusement and various cases of forced laughter.

Imagine that you are swimming in the ocean, and you find yourself a little farther from shore than you intended. The undertow is a little stronger than you anticipated, and you are not sure you are a strong enough swimmer to make it to shore. What are the things you can do to make it back safely? How can you make that stretch of water more traversable? One thing that you could do is become a better swimmer. Unfortunately it is a little late for that now. Another thing you could do is acquire some equipment, like a flotation device, or maybe a scuba tank. It is too late for that too. You could become a stronger person, with bigger muscles and greater endurance, but it is too late for that as well.

The only thing left to do in that kind of situation is create a temporary change in your physiology that will make the water more traversable. You enter a state of fear, and temporarily the water becomes more traversable. This is an enactive process that creates or modifies affordances. The affordance in this case is the traversability of that stretch of water. The physiological change that you undergo as part of that fear episode modifies that affordance. It modifies the traversability

for you of that stretch of water. That is one example. In the remainder of this section I'll give a more general account of what we call motoric enaction, before discussing social enaction in the next section.

We can think of an affordance as determined by three different sets of properties: the properties of the object itself that has the affordance, and the physiological and cognitive properties of the agent for whom it has the affordance.[3] My glass has the right structure and form to afford transferring water to my mouth, but for a baby it does not have that affordance. His fingers are too small, and muscles too weak, to manipulate an object so large and heavy. Transferring some water to a smaller, lighter cup would not help, because he also lacks the perceptual and motoric properties that constitute the skill of drinking from a cup. Affordances require the concurrence of all three types of properties.

Successful action is sometimes opportunistic: we discover objects with affordances that further our goals. Hiking in the forest, I might find a fallen branch to use as a walking stick. However, many useful affordances need to be created, and we create affordances by manipulating properties that fall into the three sets mentioned above. First, we may acquire, create or locate objects with the right properties. If I am cooking a soup, I need to buy the ingredients, bring them home to my conveniently arranged kitchen, and wash and chop them before adding them to the pot. Second, I may need to develop my skills to create the right affordances. As I learn to cook, I gain theoretical knowledge about culinary techniques, and I also acquire the motoric abilities to apply them. A knife that once afforded uneven chopping may now afford precise dicing.

Third, and most important for this paper, I may modify my body to create new affordances. These modifications come in two forms: I can create lasting changes in affordances by improving my conditioning or flexibility, or create temporary changes by initiating a specific autonomic or somatic state. Both lasting and temporary bodily changes often alter affordances by degrees. After a few months of working out, you may be able to pick up a box when previously doing so would have been very difficult or even dangerous. You have increased the liftability of the box. Similarly, you can make a box more liftable through an autonomic or somatic change that deploys bodily resources appropriately. Merely deploying those resources expends energy. However, we save energy by (ideally) deploying just enough of our resources to provide adequate affordances for the task at hand, and only for long enough to complete that task.

These temporary autonomic and somatic changes are, of course, features of emotional episodes, and the systems that deploy them operate largely outside of our conscious control. During an episode of fear our heart rate, blood pressure, and musculature all enter a modified state that facilitates great cardiac, respiratory, and muscular exertion. If you are swimming in the ocean

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[3] The concept of affordances in the enactive theory of emotions deviates from Gibson's (1979) original usage. For a comparison see Shargel and Prinz (2017).

and feel a strong undertow, these bodily changes increase the waves' affordances for swimming back to shore. There are other ways to control those affordances. However, when you are already swimming far from shore and you feel a dangerously strong undertow, it is too late for those measures. You will make due with the affordances that you find, or an involuntary fear response will improve those affordances through a temporary bodily change.

We also undergo generic changes in our motivations that are integrated with these physiological changes, and that are appropriate and compatible with these changes (Shargel 2017). When we are angry, we are physiologically prepared to take aggressive action, and we are also motivationally prepared to do so. We are motivated to do just what we are physiologically prepared to do, because we can temporarily do them more effectively and efficiently than usual. This explains why physiological manipulation can create or modify an emotional state. It is inefficient for our motivations to fall out of step with our physiological action-readiness, so changes in our physiological action-readiness need to influence our motivations. Our physiology creates and modifies affordances, and generic motivations help us capitalize on them.

5. Social Enaction

My analysis so far has focused on somatic and autonomic changes that directly influence the efficacy and efficiency of action, as well as compatible motivations. This leaves out some of the most conspicuous features of emotional embodiment: facial expression, vocal inflection, and body language.

Our approach to the publicly observable features of emotional embodiment builds on Paul Griffiths and Andrea Scarantino's (2009) situated theory of emotions. They cite a wide range of empirical evidence that contradicts conventional representational models of emotion. For example, we do not smile in response to beneficial events – we smile in response to publicly observed beneficial events (Fernandez Dols and Ruiz Belda 1997). Birds often display anger before fleeing, rather than attacking (Hinde 1985). These cases would be puzzling if emotional displays were merely effects or adjuncts of representational states. Why do we not always smile when we are happy? Why display anger if you are on the brink of retreat? Griffiths and Scarantino (2005) conclude that, "Emotional content has a fundamentally pragmatic dimension, in the sense that the environment is represented in terms of what it affords to the emoter in the way of skillful engagement with it" (p. 8).

The skillful engagement that they have in mind is engagement in social transactions. A victorious smile engages others in our success, encouraging them to see us as an appealing partner in future projects. An angry glare (or the avian equivalent) deters others from crossing us, or demands that others address our concerns. Missdirected or ill-timed smiles and glares can lead to trouble – hence the need for skillful engagement.

Given the examples they discuss, it is puzzling that Griffiths and Scarantino say that emotions represent affordances. Skillful emotional displays advance social transactions in beneficial directions. In doing so, they create or modify, rather than represent, social affordances. An effective smile turns a bystander into an ally; an effective glare turns a threat into a bystander. Emotional displays, like autonomic or somatic states, create affordances, but the affordances that they create are grounded in complex features of social reality.

Earlier in this paper I identified three kinds of properties that determine affordances: the properties of an external object, and the physiological structure and skills of an agent. Emotions alter motoric affordances by temporarily changing one's physiological structure. We can treat external social structures as the external object with regard to social enaction. Different social structures afford different types of social moves, and those moves will depend on our physical capabilities and skills. However, it is a familiar feature of game theory that the behavior of one agent is determined in part by the anticipated behavior of other agents. It follows that an agent can alter social structures, and create social affordances, by credibly indicating a disposition to act in a certain way.

I have already discussed how features of anger such as autonomic arousal improve affordances for addressing offenses. In addition, the social displays characteristic of anger send a visible and audible sign to other agents that one has improved affordances in this way. Our motivations change in sync with our affordances, so other agents also have reason to believe that the angry individual has a greater motivation to act aggressively. This public display will serve as a warning to others to avoid confronting the angry individual, and may lead others to make concessive moves. Anger may, of course, have the opposite effect, and motivate greater opposition. However, there is a clear mechanism for social displays, operating in harmony with the bodily systems responsible for motoric enaction, to produce social enaction.

6. Normative Disarmament

I have presented an abbreviated account of an enactive theory of emotions, including the enaction of social affordances. How might this account apply to humor and amusement? We can think of amusement as a state of normative disarmament. Strohminger et al. (2011) provide evidence that mirth (their term for amusement) increases our tolerance for violation of deontological rules. When we are in a state of amusement we're temporarily disposed not to take things so seriously. We're not inclined to take our own problems seriously, or to take other people's violations of mild social norms seriously. If someone does something mildly inappropriate when we are in a state of amusement we are less likely to be offended and more likely to be amused.

It makes sense that amusement would have this motivational effect, since it is equivalent to the motivational features of other types of emotional episodes. During an episode of fear, we are

disposed to see ambiguous objects as dangerous, during episodes of disgust we are disposed to see them as revolting, and so on. In general, occurrent emotions bias us to respond to ambiguous objects in a way that accords with that emotion, rather than in a way that accords with incompatible emotions. Norm violations can be amusing, but they can also be threatening or offensive. An occurrent episode of amusement biases us to perceive norm violations as amusing rather than the alternatives.[4]

It follows that amusement will modify social affordances. When we're amused we display to others that we are in a state of normative disarmament. We're not currently prepared to retaliate against mild norm violations, because we will find them pleasing rather than threatening or offensive. That is an invitation for others to violate minor norms, to be a little bit silly, since we are currently disposed to reward silly behavior.

Why should we ever enter a state of normative disarmament? First, policing social norms in a rigorous way is important, but it can also be difficult, dangerous, and expensive. It is not always necessary to take a rigorous approach, since we often spend time with people that we trust, who we don't expect to violate serious norms. It makes sense, under appropriate conditions, to enter an episode where we can give each other permission to be a little bit less proper, and take mild violations of norms less seriously.

It is best to police norms cooperatively rather than individually, since, again, policing norms can be difficult, dangerous, and expensive. Normative disarmament among individuals, just like military disarmament among states, is best undertaken in a coordinated way. When others we trust enter a state of normative disarmament it makes sense to do likewise. Contagious laughter is a mechanism that coordinates our normative disarmament.

Second, normative disarmament allows for exploration of the boundaries of norms. This is particularly useful for children. Small children need to learn about the rules that govern their society. By learning what is silly under safe conditions, they learn what is normally forbidden or discouraged. Potty humor becomes very amusing as small children take greater responsibility for their personal hygiene, and insulting humor takes hold as they are expected to participate in more cooperative and prosocial behavior.

Third, it is also possible for a group to use the license derived from collective amusement to attack outsiders. Trust allows us to let down our guard and be amused together, because we trust each other not to abuse the license granted by normative disarmament. However, that trust does not extend to the protection of those beyond the group, particularly those whose interests are beyond the concern of the members of the group. In fact, under normative disarmament the group may take pleasure in doing harm to unprotected outsiders, since group members are

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[4] That may sound like an endorsement of a perceptual theory of emotion. It is in fact a feature of our enactive theory that emotions bias perceptions. However, that is because emotions are identified with integrated physiological states, generic motivational states, and social displays, and the generic motivational states bias perception.

amused by violations of the relatively weak norms that restrict harm to outsiders. This can take the form of bullying marginalized groups and individuals, but it is also the mechanism underlying satire, which can be used to unite opposition to the powerful.

To summarize, emotions modify social affordances by credibly displaying to others what we are currently prepared to do. During an episode of amusement we are prepared to welcome benign violations rather than punish them. Credibly displaying that we are in this mode encourages others to join us in our normative disarmament. The affordances produced by this shared normative disarmament allow for friendly recreation, for playful exploration, and even for coordinating a group against outsiders.

It may seem contradictory that the social enaction account of amusement appeals to the benign violations theory. After all, according to the enactive theory of emotion, emotions only have enactive content, but the benign violations theory says that emotions represent...benign violations. How can one make use of the benign violations theory without accepting a conventional theory of emotion?

A full response to this challenge can be found in Shargel (2017) and Shargel and Prinz (2018). In brief, an enactive theory of emotion can accept that representations of benign violations are one possible method for eliciting amusement, just as representations of loss are one possible method for eliciting loss. However, the fact that representations can play that role does not mean that the emotions that they elicit have representational content. In fact, in the context of this paper it is not important to argue that emotions lack representational content. The thesis is that in order to explain the full range of forced laughter, we need to accept that emotions do have enactive content. I will make that argument in the next section.

7. Enactive Forced Laughter

In section 3 I described a range of cases of forced laughter, and discussed how conventional emotion theories might address them. I'll now return to the same cases, and argue that my enactive account is able to illuminate even the most challenging cases.

In the first class of cases forced laughter deceives its audience into thinking that the laughter is spontaneous. These cases include responding encouragingly to a not-so-funny joke made by a friend, and cooperating with the mockery of an outsider. Conventional theories had no trouble explaining these cases, and the enactive theory does not either. Spontaneous laughter is a sign of amusement, of normative disarmament. Displaying that you are in a state of normative disarmament creates social affordances in all of the ways described in section 6. Deceptive forced laughter creates all of the same social affordances, so it can be an effective way to manipulate your social environment.

The second class of cases are those that rely on emotional contagion. This phenomenon is difficult to explain within a conventional emotion theory, because conventional theories take emotions to essentially feature judgments or perceptions, and it is irrational to adopt whatever judgments your peers express. The enactive theory has an elegant explanation of these cases which I briefly discussed in section 6. Emotions prepare us to act by creating useful affordances. Cooperative action is generally more effective, so it is rational to coordinate action-preparation with your peers. Contagious laughter fits within this general account of emotion contagion. Amusement specifically is a state of normative disarmament. There are significant benefits to disarming among those we trust when they do likewise. Therefore, it makes sense to enter a state of amusement when others are amused too. Through forced laughter we help create normative disarmament in others even when we are not amused ourselves, or when we are amused but not enough to laugh spontaneously.

Finally, I'll turn to the most challenging cases. These are the cases where laughter is not contagious, and nobody is deceived about whether it expresses amusement. In the first of these cases, Brianna is bullying Taylor, and Abigail laughs at her unfunny joke. In the second, a friend punctuates an ordinary, entirely non-humorous utterance with forced laughter.

The enactive theory can appeal to the role that normative disarmament plays in uniting a group against an outsider. When we are amused we may tolerate or even welcome the violation of weakly held norms, such as the norms that protect strangers and outsiders. Brianna takes advantage of this effect to mock Taylor. When Abigail forces laughter it signals that she wishes to maintain normative disarmament, which is the basis of Brianna's mockery, even if the joke itself was not funny. If Abigail instead defended Taylor it would undermine their cooperative normative disarmament. It would imply that the norms defending outsiders like Taylor should be enforced.

Turning to the second case, it helps to recall again that we more often would like to say something funny than we actually have something funny to say. The enactive account of emotions, combined with the normative disarmament theory of humor, explain why it is so often valuable to be amusing. Of course we enjoy being amused, but there are also more subtle social benefits. When we are spending time with friends, or with people we want to form a closer relationship with, it is helpful to enter a social dynamic where each individual would tolerate, and even welcome, mild norm violations, and where everyone knows that everyone else would do so as well. This helps us enjoy our time together and become more intimate.

The question then becomes: how can we coordinate this mutual normative disarmament? One strategy is to be really funny, frequently provoking amusement and perhaps even spontaneous laughter. That is a perfectly good strategy to pursue, but it cannot be the only strategy, because most of us are not funny often enough. An alternative strategy is to punctuate your speech with a signal that the group should normatively disarm. Laughter punctuation is that signal. This does

not work as well as being funny, because this signal will not itself cause others to disarm. However it can still be effective if others understand your signal and wish to cooperate.

One might object that this strategy should not work. After all, according to the enactive theory I presented, emotional expressions create social affordances because they are reliably integrated with episodic changes in motivational and physiological action-readiness. Spontaneous laughter is integrated with one's own normative disarmament, so it induces normative disarmament in others too. Laughter punctuation is not integrated in that way, so it should not be able to create the same social affordances. Emotional enaction does not work when there is no emotion involved.

However, expressing an emotion is not the only thing that can create social affordances. Any communicative act can do so. Anything that makes a social move possible creates a social affordance. The problem is not explaining how laughter punctuation could create affordances. The problem is explaining what exactly this sort of punctuation communicates, and how this relates to the enactive qualities of spontaneous laughter.

There is something strange about using laughter punctuation. The speaker said something that was not funny at all, and then laughed for (apparently) no good reason. If the audience responds with stony silence then the speaker really does look ridiculous. However, the speaker is not trying to trick anyone with this forced laughter. He is just inviting the audience to cooperate in changing the rules of their normative engagement. Specifically, the speaker is suggesting that they deliberately adopt the normative mode that is automatically produced through shared amusement. Given this message it is natural that forced laughter would serve as the signal.

We can now see how the enactive account of amusement informs the explanation of laughter punctuation. This sort of forced laughter, which clearly does not express amusement, may seem entirely unrelated to humor. However, according to the enactive account, humor has the effect of inducing a state of normative disarmament, and spontaneous laughter helps coordinate normative disarmament through its contagious effects. We often wish to enter a state of mutual normative disarmament, even when nobody is amused. We wish to create just those affordances that humor has the power to create. Laughter punctuation serves as an invitation to join the speaker in deliberately creating those affordances.

I'll raise one more objection to this view: does this interpretation imply that the folk already understand and endorse the enactive view of humor? After all, I claim that laughter punctuation is an invitation to cooperate in creating a set of social affordances. Approximately no one has the necessary concepts to either make or accept that invitation. Does that mean that laughter punctuation cannot serve that role?

Fortunately there is a less technical, and functionally equivalent, way to analyze laughter punctuation. The speaker laughs, inviting the audience to play along. Playing along means acting as if you were amused and having a great time, even if you are not. By playing along you are

creating a state of mutual normative disarmament, even if you lack the concept 'normative disarmament'. The enactive theory of humor provides an explanation of what playing along amounts to in this sort of case, and why it is valuable.

I have argued that forced laughter complicates our understanding of amusement in a productive way. If you approach amusement from the perspective of conventional theories of emotion it is natural to think of amusement as an emotional state with representational content, and laughter as a public expression of that content. However, forced laughter is pervasive and diverse, and it demands explanation. In particular, laughter punctuation is a common form of forced laughter that resists assimilation into conventional theories of emotion and emotional expression. The enactive theory of emotion is well suited to explain even the most challenging cases of forced laughter.

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