

Slide 1

Dark Humour in the Clinical Setting Part 1: What is Humour?

Brendan Leier, PhD
Clinical Ethicist, University of Alberta and Stollery Children's Hospitals
Mazankowski Heart Institute
Clinical Assistant Professor Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry
John Dossetor Health Ethics Centre

Slide 2

why care about humour?

Slide 3

why care about humour?

- Humour is human – humour is humane

Slide 4

why care about humour?

- Humour is human – humour is humane
- The Gladwell – Colbert exchange

Slide 5

why care about humour?

- Humour is human – humour is humane
- The Gladwell – Colbert exchange
- Whence the darkness?

Slide 6

why care about humour?

- Humour is human – humour is humane
- The Gladwell – Colbert exchange
- Whence the darkness?
- Building a family building a team

Slide 7

why care about humour?

- Humour is human – humour is humane
- The Gladwell – Colbert exchange
- Whence the darkness?
- Building a family building a team
- Work on humour is historically/proportionately absent in philosophy/academia

Slide 8

What is a humour project?

Slide 9

What is a humour project?

- Originally an invitation to do a book chapter on 'Dark Humour in the clinical setting'

Slide 10

What is a humour project?

- Originally an invitation to do a book chapter on 'Dark Humour in the clinical setting'
- After reviewing the literature and enduring a time of somber brooding, it became clear that the topic deserved care - a loving treatment

Slide 11

What is a humour project?

- Originally an invitation to do a book chapter on 'Dark Humour in the clinical setting'
- After reviewing the literature and enduring a time of somber brooding, it became clear that the topic deserved care - a loving treatment
- Tentative Proposed Questions:
 - Is 'dark humour' a kind or a context?
 - How is humour used?
 - Examples, good and bad.

Slide 12

What is a humour project?

- Proposed methodology: X-phi... Think – listen – think
- Interview process with pre-selection in four initial services: psychiatry, critical care, palliative, surgery.

Slide 13

Think pt.1 What is Humour?

- Theories of humour

Slide 14

Think pt.1 What is Humour?

- Theories of humour
 - The superiority theory
 - The incongruity theory
 - The relief theory
 - The benign violation theory
 - The play theory

Slide 15

The superiority theory (Hobbes)

“Humour is a sudden glory arising in some conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly”

Strengths: still readily observable as an example of comedy, eg. Blond jokes, fat jokes, etc.

Weakness: lack of explanatory power, paints humour as morally deficient.

Slide 16

The Relief Theory (Freud)

Humour is a mechanism to release increasing internal tension, with varying forms of humour relieve different tensions or impulses. As we age, maturity replaces humour as we gain mastery over said impulses. This type of humour is especially prevalent in taboo or extreme circumstances.

Slide 17

Incongruence Theory (Kant, Schopenhauer)

Humour is the result of the disappointment of our expectations of the way the world is or ought to be. The greater the incongruity, the better the joke.

Slide 18

Benign Violation Theory

Slide 19

Benign Violation Theory

- Three conditions:

Slide 20

Benign Violation Theory

- Three conditions:
- violation

Slide 21

Benign Violation Theory

- Three conditions:
- Violation
 - Violation is benign

Slide 22

Benign Violation Theory

Three conditions:

- Violation
- Violation is benign
- Both realizations occur simultaneously

Slide 23

The Play Theory

Humour is a form of extended and sophisticated play that allows and facilitates learning, boundary-making, trust, and social bonding. Humour especially requires participation and gratuity, a comportment on the part of the actor and the recipient that models other and subsequent relationship forming.

Slide 24

What do we ultimately want?

What do we ultimately want?

- This project is not about defining the essence of humour, nor its vivisection.
- We begin with Wittgenstein's assumption that the meaning of humour will be established by its use, and that all the definitions discussed today will be present in stories of clinical humour.
- I propose that the project observe the uses of humour in the clinical setting, listen to the successful accounts, the failed accounts, to gain a better sense of whether 'dark humour' is an example of a macabre and privileged unprofessional activity or if it is simply a fundamentally humane response to dark circumstances and a potentially inoperable affliction of the condition of being human.
