

Human, Klingon and Vulcan Humor
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Abstract

This article takes a humorous look at a very serious topic. The topic discussed is the benefit of humor in good health and resilience, and through the use of extraterrestrial species, comparing different levels of humor. Throughout this article, the author highlights research in the field and personal opinion that all indicate the benefit of both humor and laughter in resiliency and getting through tough times.

Human, Klingon and Vulcan Humor

Humor appears to be part of the human condition. For as long as humankind has had recorded history, humor has been part of it. In fact, humor may not even be exclusive to humanity. Studies have shown (Lovgren, 2005) that certain animal species, such as the chimpanzee and dolphin, partake in humor, to say nothing of Klingons. Of course, it is known that Vulcans have no sense of humor, as they are completely logical (Starfleet Academy Diplomatic Training Films).

What is needed is a definition of humor and study into when humor is used, how humor is used and the effectiveness of humor in increasing one's capacity to cope with stress, which is broadly defined as resilience. Who knows, this research may actually be able to convince the Vulcans, through the use of logic, that they need to develop a sense of humor!

Humor is most commonly defined as:

1. A comic quality causing amusement: the humor in a situation.
 2. The faculty to see what is amusing or comical.
 3. The faculty of expressing the amusing or comical.
 4. Comical writing or talk in general: comical books, skits, plays, etc....
 7. A temporary mood or frame of mind.
 6. Mental disposition or temperament.
- Humor consists principally in the recognition and expression of incongruities or peculiarities present in a situation or character. It is frequently used to illustrate some fundamental absurdity in human nature or conduct. (Webster, 1989, p. 692)

So, it is easy to see that laughter and humor are all around us. It is thought in general folk wisdom that a good sense of humor is an indication that a person has a healthy outlook on life and they who laugh a lot will live long and happy lives. But is the folk lore accurate? It would seem to be.

Humor seems to be something that helps to ensure human survival. "...humor helps humanity endure. When the substantive areas in which humor operates are examined, the thesis that humor is a survival mechanism can be documented" (Koller, 1988, p. 26). It is interesting that there are no studies that

show the same for Vulcans or Klingons, but as can often be seen when Klingons are gathered socially, there is much in the way of humor occurring. Perhaps if Starfleet were forced to respond, their diplomatic training corps may have some information to add to this discussion. They have yet to respond in print form to inquiries of this nature at the time of this writing.

It is just as interesting to see that when Vulcans are gathered socially, there is no evidence of humorous interplay between beings. Nor has there ever been a recorded event when a Vulcan used or expressed humor. When presented with a humorous situation, Spock often said to Captain Kirk after Kirk said that the event or statement was funny: “indeed;” which was spoken completely with a straight face!

Humans on the other hand do appear to benefit from humor and even laughter without humor. Provine’s (2001) study of laughter reported that even without humor, human beings can benefit by laughter. He even suggested, as does Jasheway (1996) that people take a few moments per day and laugh. If nothing else, it should keep those around you guessing what you are up to, or about your sanity! The health benefits are supported by many more studies and authors than just Jasheway and Provine. Berk (2001) notes multiple psychological as well as physiological benefits of both laughter and humor. Laughter, according to Berk, “improves mental functioning [by] increases [in] catecholamine levels...[it] exercises and relaxes muscles...improves respiration...stimulates circulation...decreases stress hormones...increases the immune system’s defenses [and] increases the production of endorphins” (p. 328).

Okay Vulcans, are you reading this paper logically? If Berk’s work is insufficient to prove logically that laughter and humor are good for health, it should be noted that the studies of Tugade, Fredrickson and Barrett (2004) and Marci (2006) all support the hypothesis that laughter and humor are both good for your health. Humans can also view Vulcans as a race with terminal seriousness. In workshops given by Alan Glickman and in his writings (1992) there are references to the warning signs of terminal seriousness.

It is easy to see the Vulcan race in these signals. Not all of the signs or signals are exhibited by the Vulcans, but most are. These signals include: "...Difficulty swallowing humor. Emotional constipation...Hardening of the attitudes" (The Warning Signs section). If we see Mr. Spock from the USS Enterprise as a typical Vulcan, we can definitely see these characteristics of terminal seriousness.

On a more serious note, for humans, humor is known as an effective coping strategy. This application of humor can be useful to relieve life's little stresses as well as serious life threatening situations. In a study by Gavrilovic et al. (2003) of civilian survivors of air attacks, it was found that those who used humor to cope with the stress of the attack were in the top three groups that showed the least amount of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) intrusive events. Humor can be used to deflect stress in a myriad of ways. This is backed up in multiple research studies. "Research on the relationships between laughter and coping with stress has found that people can and do use humor to cope with stress and adversity" (Nezlek & Derks, 2001, p. 395).

In the study of Nezlek and Derks (2001) coping with life's stress through humor was researched using the Coping with Humor scale designed by Lefcourt and Martin, the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), the Interaction Anxiousness Scale (IAS), the Texas Social Behavior Inventory and the Rochester Interaction Record. The findings of this study indicate that the use of humor in social situations increases the likelihood of a positive social interaction as well as noting that

people who use humor to cope may make light of their own problems, easing the burden experienced by others, and they may provide others with more palatable (more humorous and less serious) forms of support, particularly appropriate for minor day-to-day problems. Such ease and success may translate into greater enjoyment and a greater sense of efficacy (confidence) in day-to-day interaction. (p. 406)

Or, said another way, so that the logical Vulcans can understand: if you use humor, you will have less stress in your every day life, you will be able to help others' distress and you will even feel better

in social interactions. Klein (1989) states that humor is a form of mini-vacation from sad times. Not that humor makes the sadness or pain go away, but at least, “humor instantly took us away, [from the sadness of the cancer] even if only for moments, from our troubles and made them easier to bear. It gave us a breather...that allowed us to regain our strength and pull our resources together” (p. xvii).

Like a typical Vulcan, Godfrey (2004) may have doubted the efficacy of humor and or laughter in good health, so he asked the experts. Godfrey interviewed two well renowned experts on the value of therapeutic humor: Dr. Joel Goodman from The Humor Project and Dr. William Frey, Jr. from Stamford. The opening line in this article sums up the findings: “laughter can be good medicine” (p. 474). But who knew how much good medicine laughter is, or the sense of humor that most healthy people seem to have. Godfrey (2004) states:

Laughter appears to do much more than provide a coping mechanism to face major illness. It can reduce stress hormones and boost the immune system. Laughter can reduce blood pressure by increasing vascular blood flow, and it can provide an aerobic workout. Laughing 100 times is equal in caloric expenditure to 10 minutes on a rowing machine or 15 minutes on an exercise bike. (Which would your patients rather do? And you?) (p.474)

Godfrey also asked the experts if they thought that the role of laughter and humor had become increasingly acceptable in the medical community. They responded in the affirmative. Yet, this author found no questions as to whether Vulcans or Klingons thought laughter was good medicine. This author can only assume that this was an oversight on Godfrey’s part.

And lest we become too focused on humor and laughter, Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh and Larkin (2003) conducted a study to link many positive emotions with resilience. They found that, although sometimes fleeting, positive emotions in general are beneficial for resilience. In addition to the general findings noted above, Fredrickson et al. stated: “resilient people have been found to use humor...and optimistic thinking as ways of coping” (p. 369).

In conclusion, it appears to this author that the use of humor, in a personal sense, to foster one's resilience can be considered an effective tactic. It also appears that humor and laughter have both psychological and physiological benefits in humans and those humans who laugh a lot, and have an optimistic and humorous outlook on life will reap these benefits. Further physiological studies of Vulcans and Klingons are necessary to document the equivalent physical and psychological benefits in these races. However, it would seem that the evidence presented in this study should prevail upon the Vulcan logic and Vulcans should develop a sense of humor.

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