

For my entire life, I've been intrigued by comedy. It is both incredibly simple and infuriatingly complex. Strangely, humor is a concept that surrounds us constantly, yet there is little understanding of it. When you really think about it, there's nothing less universal in this world than humor. Comedy can be separated by time, location, or even beliefs. Americans don't enjoy British humor. Older generations don't understand the jokes of their children. Political party, wealth, and even religion can affect whether someone believes a joke is funny. Yet despite these variables, there are those among us who we consider to be "objectively" funny.

Every comedian is different, with their own style and techniques. From the abrasiveness of Bill Burr to the nonchalance of Mark Normand, there is no one way to be funny. But regardless of each comedian's individual style, they are all aiming for the same target. Anyone who has or will ever tell a joke is working towards the shared goal of pleasing their audience. That's what makes comedy so interesting; we all know the destination, but the journey is entirely unique. This is why I consider comedy the inverse of math. Whereas math is an objective concept with a consistent end and guaranteed process, comedy is a risk. There is no such thing as a risk-free joke — no guaranteed laugh.

But comedy is more than just uncertain. There's an old adage from Mark Twain that goes, "Humor is tragedy plus time." By most interpretations, this quote refers to our own pain and how we distance ourselves from hardships, so we can look back and laugh. Which for the most part is true. But what happens when the tragedy is no longer our own? This is called "Dark Humor," humor that goes against social norms or mocks events considered taboo. The question becomes when these jokes become in poor taste. When does the discomfort or grief of others outweigh the intended pleasure the joke is supposed to cause? Not only does a good comedian have to deal with the variability of their audience, but they also have to walk the thin line between jester and

bully. This brings up a fascinating question about morality; is it worth making others laugh at the expense of someone else? Personally, I've had to debate this question in my life several times. How far is too far? Does it even matter if the jokes are funny? Infuriatingly, like everything mentioned before, there is no straight answer. There are times when cruel jokes are okay, and lighthearted jests cross the line.

That's the thing about jokes — you learn what's funny through experience. Although others may disagree, comedy cannot be taught in a class. It is a series of trials and errors. Famous comedians never wrote their perfect set their first try. It took time and failure, to refine the jokes and polish them. They had to fail to succeed. The funniest among us has probably told the most unfunny jokes while creating their own style and understanding their own strengths. Studying great comedians is how you understand the technique, but to develop your own voice, you have to put yourself out there.

At the risk of sounding cliché, comedy is very similar to life. There are no guarantees, and those who truly succeed are the ones who take risks — learning what the crowd likes by failing. It's about rising through falling, and even if someone thinks they cannot be funny, they can try, fail, and learn from it. Humor is deeply personal. Everyone draws the lines they find worth crossing and telling the jokes they want to tell. Comedy may not be universal, but comedians are.