



CHAPTER 12

Expressive Art Therapy

Draw me how you feel.

—Brian Luke Seaward

When the children of Sandy Hook elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut, returned to classes about a week after the massacre, teachers and therapists skipped the prepared lesson plans and instead had the children draw their feelings about what had happened on December 14, 2012. So much of what they experienced was not only beyond their comprehension, it was beyond their ability to describe in words. Where words fail, pictures deliver. It is well understood that many thoughts and feelings about tragedy and stress are nonverbal. It is also well recognized that holding these feelings inside can become toxic. Drawing as a form of therapy isn't just for kids. The visual arts are now known to be an effective coping tool for people of all ages.

With the advent of the Internet, where people can and do add their two cents to any Web site, send hourly Facebook updates, text message until their thumbs go numb, and send hundreds of 140-character tweets all over the planet, we have entered what is now being called the age of self-expression. Words, however, only represent a small fraction of true self-expression. The unconscious mind, which governs behavior, uses symbols, images, and pictures as a far more efficient means to communicate and express itself. Expression of oneself

through art goes back ages (FIG. 12.1). In fact, art, as a mode of self-expression, dates back several thousands of years to the cave drawings in Lascaux, France, and perhaps much earlier. But just recently in the development of modern civilization has art become a recognized effective coping technique in the field of stress management. Art therapy is based on the premise that many thoughts, feelings, and insights are verbally inexpressible. Several abstract constructs of the human mind lack the necessary vocabulary to adequately describe the focus, intensity, and understanding of daily encounters that the mind tries to process and grasp. This is only exacerbated in times of stress. Self-expression through visual artistic media offers a balance to verbal expression in the search for wholeness through the understanding of our personal thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and attitudes.

Art therapy has been described by the American Art Therapy Association as "the use of art in a creative process to provide the opportunity for a nonverbal expression

Art therapy: A coping technique of self-expression and self-awareness employing various media to describe feelings and thoughts in ways that verbal language cannot.

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nonverbal, artistic, and spatial right-brain functions and the analytical, logical, and verbal left-brain functions. With the evidence gathered from split-brain research, it has now become obvious that the optimal human potential involves balance and integration of the right and left cognitive functions of the brain. As the discipline of art therapy continues to expand beyond the clinical setting, a greater understanding of its benefits will be realized.

You may think that coloring books are just for kids, but art therapy has gone mainstream with the popularity of coloring books designed specifically for adults. What was once considered a trend in the mid-2000s has now become a fixture in offices where employees are striving for work-life balance and detoxing from staring at computer screens all day. The most popular coloring books include mandalas, and people are encouraged to go "outside the lines." Although art therapy experts claim that coloring books are a watered-down version of art therapy ("art therapy lite"), their relaxation effects are well recognized, including reduced anxiety levels (Fitzpatrick, 2016) (FIG. 12.2).

Today, art therapy is recognized for its many therapeutic effects on aspects of mental, physical, spiritual, and, most notably, emotional well-being. Art therapists agree that there are several goals associated with this technique to enhance the healing process and well-being. As described by art therapist Myra Levick (1983), these include:

1. *To provide a means for strengthening the ego:* To allow a better sense of identity through discovery of personal interests and growth issues
2. *To provide a cathartic experience:* To let emotions that have an immobilizing effect be released in the physical act of creating personal expression through art



FIGURE 12.2 Adults are rediscovering what young kids have known all along; coloring books can be stress relievers. Adult coloring books, particularly mandalas, are more than a passing trend; they have become a popular coping technique for stress.

3. *To provide a means to uncover anger:* To employ the use of colors and shapes to express and detect feelings of aggression
4. *To offer an avenue to reduce guilt:* By conveying inner thoughts of past feelings and behavior associated with the guilt process
5. *To facilitate impulse control:* To allow freedom of self-expression, rather than its repression, through a positive behavior
6. *To help patients/clients use art as a new outlet during incapacitating illness:* To use art as a tool to strengthen the mind-body connection by using various art media to augment the imagery aspect of self-healing

Clinical Use of Art Therapy

Art therapy, primarily drawing and illustration, has been employed in many settings, including drug rehabilitation centers, eating-disorder clinics, veterans' hospitals, clinics for the emotionally disturbed, prisons, and oncology (cancer) hospital wards. Often, the manifestations of physical and emotional problems inhibit people in the verbal expression of their feelings. Yet, without some type of communication or self-expression, the progress of healing is stifled. Art therapy serves to break through this barrier. The dichotomy of hemispheric cognitive functions, revealed through split-brain research, has validated the concept that verbal communication is only one way to express our innermost thoughts. Feelings of anger, depression, fear, grief, guilt, and worry, when expressed in graphic form, begin to release residual toxins of these thoughts from the depths of the unconscious mind. In guided art therapy, drawings are either directed—themes or guidelines are suggested by the art therapist—or spontaneous, with the freedom to draw whatever comes to mind, to help release suppressed or toxic feelings.

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FIGURE 12.1 Art, as a personal expression, dates back thousands of years, as shown in these photos of rock art petroglyphs drawn by ancient American Indians, discovered at Three Rivers, New Mexico, and believed to be more than 2,000 years old.

and communication in which to reconcile and foster self-awareness and personal growth." Art therapy is centered on exploration of the individual's internal landscape, carved and shaped by one's collective experiences and delivered through a visual, artistic sense. Art therapy can strengthen the bonds of self-communication, thereby promoting greater self-awareness and self-comfort. Art therapy can also be described as a voyage of self-discovery, with process and product uniting to promote self-realization and self-healing. For this reason, art therapy is considered a coping technique in the strategic plan to deal with stress because awareness of problems must occur before steps to resolve perceived stress can be taken.

If you consider that your thoughts and behaviors are a product of your unconscious mind, and the unconscious mind communicates in symbols, colors, and images, rather than words, then tapping into the wealth and power of the unconscious mind as a means to cope with stress is advantageous, if not essential, for everyone. Art therapy is a proven way to do just this.

Origins of Art Therapy

The seeds of this discipline took root as early as the field of professional psychology itself. At the turn of the twentieth century, Freud and Jung engaged several of their patients in drawing to better understand several psychological disorders through the visual expression of their emotions. But it was the work of Margaret Naumburg, an American art teacher and director of Walden Art School, who found the use of art a powerful form of therapeutic communication for several

children she taught. Naumburg observed that self-expression through spontaneous art became a psychotherapeutic treatment in its own right. With the backing and assistance of her colleague, Dr. Nolan Lewis, she conducted research involving children classified with problem or troublesome behaviors at the New York State Psychiatric Unit. Her first findings were published in 1947; however, it took several more years for her theory to take root. Naumburg's theory dealt primarily with the unconscious expression of nonverbal thoughts as an important tool in psychoanalysis. She proposed that with the interpretive help of a therapist, the patients' artwork would aid in their own treatment and recovery.

A second theory, developed by art teacher Edith Kramer in 1971, suggested that the process of drawing itself was therapeutic, and that more attention should be given to the creative, cathartic process than to the final product, the illustration. Since its inception as a discipline, many theories have been added to the study of art therapy, based on the foundation by Naumburg and Kramer. The role of the art therapist has also matured in this evolution. Originally seen as the primary vehicle for interpretation of the artist's work, the art therapist is now viewed as a blend of artist, therapist, and teacher. The art therapist serves as a catalyst to help the artist uncover his or her own meaningful interpretation and to use that interpretation as an awareness tool to further personal growth and development. According to art therapist Eleanor Ulman (1961), the role of an art therapist is "to help people bring out from within themselves a source of motivation—the wish to organize the experience of their inner and outer worlds into a coherent form."

Not until the 1960s did art therapy emerge as its own discipline, with specialists becoming trained and certified in the theoretical basis and application of this type of therapy. In 1969, the American Art Therapy Association was established. Originally, in its most clinical form, art therapy was designed as a diagnostic tool used by art therapists and psychologists to understand personality development and self-expression of patients with clinical disorders. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, art therapy became recognized and accepted as a coping technique for all individuals to increase self-awareness as well as act as an outlet for emotional expression. Currently, the benefits of visual expression through various art media are acknowledged for everyone. To date, research in the field of art therapy consists mostly of clinical case studies—that is, individuals, who, in their recovery process, have attained a breakthrough in self-discovery through creative art. Conventional wisdom indicates that art therapy initiates a stronger partnership between the

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FIGURE 12.3 A simple drawing of a tree can indicate a great many things about someone and his or her level of self-esteem.

Every mark, every spot, and every line drawn, painted, or sketched is considered an extension of the individual's mind. Through repeated analysis and interpretation of the works created by a host of patients from every conceivable background and with every health-related problem, some recurring archetypal images appear to represent specific parts of one's personality. For example, trees (FIG. 12.3) are thought to represent energy levels or a perspective on one's life. A full, leafy tree with a broad trunk is indicative of vibrant energy and strong-willed nature, while a barren, skinny tree suggests frailty, lack of hope, perhaps even death. Houses may represent either security or imprisonment, depending on the size of windows, doors, and the location of people in the setting. All images have importance, just as all aspects of each image convey a special meaning to the person who drew the picture (Asperheim, 1982). The recognition of this importance reveals various aspects of one's psychic landscape. And, as much can be revealed by what is not drawn as by what is pictorially represented. For instance, in self-portraits, people who draw faces with no mouths or ears suggest an inability to express their feelings verbally. Long arms may express a desire to reach out for help or affection. Short arms may signify feelings of withdrawal. Short necks indicate stubbornness. Boxed shoulders hint of the inability to let matters roll off the back.

Nonverbal expression: Many thoughts and feelings cannot be expressed verbally, giving rise to art therapy as a means of nonverbal expression.

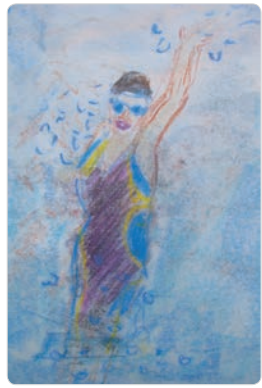
According to art therapist Evelyn Virshup (1978), the importance of art therapy is in the process, not necessarily the outcome. The expression of oneself through art far exceeds the aesthetic quality to the viewer: "Someone who is asked to draw how they feel, and is then measured by the yardstick of aesthetics will feel betrayed, and will repress further feelings. Creativity of expression is stifled by judgmental evaluation." A crucial factor in the practice of art therapy is the collaborative verbal description of the picture once it has been drawn. The role of the art therapist is to guide the artist through his or her understanding of each work. This is done by asking open-ended questions such as, "What does the picture mean? In many cases, the artist may not overtly recognize the emotional significance of the work (e.g., missing features, significant color selection, or disproportional figures) or may not be quite ready to accept verbally what has been depicted graphically. Art therapists suggest that, upon completion of the drawing, the artist try to explain what the figure represents, perhaps even to write it down on the corner of the drawing. This serves to balance the nonverbal expression with the verbal expression and further the communication process of the conscious and unconscious minds. This combination leads to better awareness and comprehension of the situation at hand and the emotions associated with it (FIG. 12.4).

In 1971, a radiation oncologist named Carl Simonton formulated a concept for cancer patients involving, among other things, the integration of mental imagery and art therapy. In a pioneer program to teach cancer patients to take an active role in their own recovery, Simonton and his then-wife Stephanie designed a strategic approach to attack cancer from all sides—mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually—with a host of progressive coping and relaxation techniques. In perhaps the most significant plank to bridge the fields of alternative and modern medicine, mental imagery and art therapy were employed as complementary tools to fight cancer cells and help rejuvenate the body (Simonton, 1978).

On the premise that people must take active responsibility for their own health, Simonton asked his patients to imagine a flood of white blood cells attacking and devastating the cancer cells in their bodies. In the creative minds of his patients, the white blood cells took on metaphorical images of armies of white knights in shining armor or schools of great white sharks in confrontation with their prey. Simonton had several patients draw pictures of these images to reinforce the power of visualization. Additional pictures were drawn at various stages of their



FIGURE 12.4 The artist drew a picture of herself with some health issues (sore neck and hands) explaining that she was “experiencing some physical limitations yet I plan to do some more activities such as hiking and swimming” (left). Her second illustration (right), drawn weeks later, reveals a new direction and energy in her life, with good things on the horizon.



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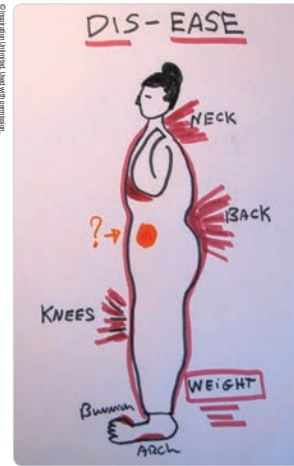


FIGURE 12.5 Choosing the theme of illness (stress and disease), this woman made an immediate connection between her emotions and various physical ailments, even labeling her illustration “Dis-Ease.”

represented in some aspect of the patients' illustrations. Not all of his patients had this exceptional ability, and their drawings often foreshadowed imminent death. In the spirit of Jung, Siegel soon came upon the realization that messages from the unconscious mind manifest in symbolic images and characteristics. These images accentuate the patient's fears, anger, levels of self-esteem, grief, guilt, and the intensity of the personal problems

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): The mental, emotional, and physical repercussions experienced after an extremely stressful experience (e.g., war combat, natural disasters, rape and sexual abuse, car accidents).

and conflicts that ultimately pave the path to disease. In one illustration, a patient drew herself at the extreme right-hand, bottom corner of the page, leaving the rest of the paper blank. This was interpreted to suggest low self-esteem, which was later confirmed by the artist. In a similar episode, a young boy drew only the top half of his body over the entire page, leaving the physician curious and frightened. The young boy then turned the page over to reveal the bottom half, hinting that recovery was well on its way—and putting a huge smile on Siegel's face.

Although there are exceptions, there is a consensus among art therapists that regardless of gender, nationality, or ethnic upbringing, each color in art therapy represents an archetypal meaning. Typically, the color selection as well as the objects drawn (e.g., house, tree) parallel emotional expressions of one's mental health. The following list suggests associations between colors and their archetypal meanings:

- Red: passionate emotional peaks (from pleasure to pain); can represent either compassion or anger
- Orange: life change (big or small)
- Yellow: energy (usually a positive message)
- Blue and green: happiness and joy (blue may even mean creativity)
- Purple/violet: highly spiritual nature; unconditional love
- Brown (and earth-tone colors): a sense of groundedness and stability
- Black: (1) grief, despair, or fear or (2) a sense of personal empowerment
- White: (1) fear, avoidance, or coverage or (2) hope
- Gray: ambiguity or uncertainty

Although cancer patients have received the most publicity from their use of art therapy as a coping technique, art therapists have also used this tool in the awareness and recovery process of other stress-related problems, including migraine headaches (FIG. 12.6), gastrointestinal problems, anorexia, and post-traumatic stress disorders of patients surviving the atrocities of war. The creation of sketches and sculptures has been a significant tool in the treatment of Vietnam veterans with **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** as described by J. Horgan (1988) in *Scientific American*. Horgan reported that many former soldiers were still held prisoner by the haunting memories of death and carnage, leaving them emotionally immobilized after returning home. But through the introduction of this type of therapy,



FIGURE 12.6 An example of art therapy used to treat migraine headache. Notice no mouth is drawn in this illustration (supporting the concept of the somatizer).

veterans found a tremendous sense of relief through transferring their destructive images from the depths of their minds onto paper, canvas, or clay. Although not particularly anxious to talk about their war experiences, the vets used their illustrations and sculptures as an outlet to help vanquish the emotions associated with their traumatic experiences and to initiate one facet of the healing and growth process. Art therapy for Vietnam veterans has proved so successful that in 1981 an art museum in Chicago was established for Vietnam vets to exhibit their work. Efforts have been made with similar art therapy programs involving Iraq war veterans, as noted by *Washington Post* reporter Jackie Spinner (2007).

The treatment of self-mutilation and eating disorders, particularly anorexia nervosa, has also included art therapy as a part of the process. In these conditions, the patient often feels helpless to control his or her existing environment and identity. Perceptions of stress are turned inward and manifested through a process of slow physical self-destruction. Inner conflicts regarding control issues are manifested through significant weight loss, which is paralleled by a distorted body image. In

A study conducted at Goldsmiths College employing art therapy with anorexics (Levick, 1983), it was noted that the subjects rarely drew human figures. When they were drawn, however, they showed adolescent characteristics suggesting a denial of adult responsibilities and physical maturation. Paintings and sketches by patients often depicted images of isolation and loneliness; in one case, a subject drew herself as a cactus. Progress was noted when subjects began to represent their true physical conditions—that is, they drew themselves in human form. Art as a means of self-expression by anorexic patients was perceived to help increase self-awareness by opening the lines of communication within the individual, thus acknowledging strengths and weaknesses, and an increased comfort with both.

In the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001, when schools reopened in New York City (and even other districts nationwide), students were invited to express and share their level of stress by drawing their thoughts, feelings, and images on paper as a cathartic exercise to relieve emotional suffering, much of which could not be articulated by words alone (Flatow, 2002). Schoolteachers in and around military bases are known to often use art therapy with grade-school and middle-school children during military conflicts and natural disasters such as the 2010 earthquake that devastated Haiti. Students are asked to draw their feelings regarding the respective wars and their parents' involvement. Typically, the drawings reveal fears of abandonment, detachment, sorrow, and loneliness. The bottom line is that everyone, regardless of their personal experiences, can benefit from art therapy.

Just as much can be revealed by a picture, much can also be revealed by casual doodles, the kind that accompany lecture notes, decorate grocery lists, or are scribbled on paper napkins (Fig. 12.7). Psychologist Robert Burns has researched the meanings of doodles only to find that they are another form of art therapy. Doodles are nonverbal messages that surface from the unconscious mind, each doodle or mark important in its own right. Often, doodles are symbols of thoughts, feelings, and perceptions in visual form. Although the understanding of “doodling” is in its infancy, several observations have been made by Burns (Jaret, 1991). Aggression is often expressed in dark, heavy, jagged lines with arrows or points. Horizontal lines convey inner peace. Happiness is typically represented by soft, curly lines. Burns discovered that men typically draw geometric shapes—squares, triangles,



FIGURE 12.7 Doodles may not seem like a form of therapy, but they, too, reveal what cannot be expressed verbally.



FIGURE 12.8 This illustration was drawn by a student who saw herself as having high self-esteem. The fish represents beauty and freedom. The color orange represents a major life change (the artist was a graduating senior) and the green plant (stability) with four leaves represented four job offers she had received.

circles—whereas women tend to sketch faces. Like the conscious effort to draw a graphic representation of our feelings, unconscious doodling also conveys important messages about the internal landscape (FIG. 12.8).

Artistic roadblocks: The perceived inability to express oneself through creative expression (often based on fear).

Steps to Initiate Art Therapy

The beauty of art therapy is that anyone can participate and its significant therapeutic effect benefits not only cancer patients, but anyone experiencing the signs and symptoms of perceived stress. In this case, as with other coping and relaxation techniques, the word *therapy* does not reflect weakness or needing help. Rather, art therapy serves to augment understanding of the personal awareness and resolution process. The therapy appears to trigger a progression of two responses. The first is a cathartic effect, whereby you can release pent-up emotions and thoughts from your mind onto paper (or clay). The second is a greater sense of personal awareness based on an objective look at or interpretation of the artwork—that is, the message it suggests or implies. This interpretation or awareness is often a communication from the unconscious mind regarding less-than-obvious symbolic images. Although an interpretation can be helpful in the self-awareness process, without some prior knowledge or assistance, meaning could also be overlooked, mistaken, or misconstrued. Thus, there are several factors to consider to ensure the effectiveness of this technique, including **artistic roadblocks**, materials, illustrative themes, and interpretation.

Artistic Roadblocks

The most common reason people have to art therapy is, "I can't draw!" The truth is, everyone can draw, in a way specific to their own talents and abilities. A case in point is Irishman Christie Brown. A paraplegic without use of his hands because of cerebral palsy, he painted with his left foot. Many people are hesitant to draw out of embarrassment. But in art therapy it doesn't matter what your abilities are. Whether your creative talents are best described as third-grade stick figures or are undisputed re-creations of Monet and Rembrandt, it makes no difference. Abstract images, fine-detailed sketches, simple lines, colors, and shapes are all equally important. Art therapy is noncompetitive. There is no right or wrong. With this obstacle out of the way, you're ready to give it a try.

Materials

Opinions vary greatly on the choice of medium recommended for art therapy. The one factor agreed upon is that there should be a wide assortment of colors to allow full expression. Art therapists generally agree that the best medium is colored pastels, as they are the easiest to work with for both broad strokes and fine lines. Siegel, on the

other hand, advocates crayons. Crayons not only come in all colors of the rainbow, says Siegel, but they bring out the child in the artist, a characteristic that promotes familiar receptivity to this medium. While pastels and crayons are preferred, colored pencils can also be used. Virshup advocates the availability of all media, including string dipped in paint and dragged across the paper. The purpose behind all these media is to have as wide a variety of colors as possible, so pen and pencil are not advocated but in a pinch will suffice. Finger paints have been used with children, and modeling clay has also been shown to be effective for this technique. Paper selection is a less problematic decision. Art therapists highly recommend the economical blank newsprint (18" × 24"); Siegel suggests a white sheet of paper; however, any type of paper in most any size will suffice. Once you have these materials, all you need is an idea and some inspiration to put pastel or crayon in your hand and draw.

Illustrative Themes

When art therapy is used as a coping technique to deal with stress, there is a host of themes and concepts providing inspiration to choose from. One approach is just to start drawing (anything) until you achieve some level of comfort with this technique. Other themes are more specific to events, feelings, or situations that words seem inadequate to describe. I have tried (with much success) the following themes in my classes:

1. **Art therapy images:** Introductory art therapy sessions are typically initiated with two or three themes such as:
 - a. *Draw something that represents you.* This could be a symbol of yourself; a picture of something you identify yourself with, such as your profession, family, hobbies, home; or something that gives you inner strength.
 - b. *Draw two fantasy animals.* Draw whichever two animals come to mind, even creations of animals that do not exist on the planet. Then, describe the animals you have drawn in a few words (approximately three adjectives) on the back of the paper (from Virshup's art therapy workshop).
 - c. *Close your eyes and draw a line on the paper.* Make the line any shape—straight, curved, jagged, fuzzy, or thin, whatever strikes your fancy, but keep your eyes closed while you draw. Next, open your eyes and take a look at



FIGURE 12.9 This illustration was drawn by a student who chose the theme in which one closes one's eyes, draws a line, and then opens the eyes and turns the paper around slowly until an image comes to mind. In this case, the student completed the illustration by drawing a Santa Fe fresco in the likeness of the Virgin Mary.

what you see. You can rotate the paper around slowly until something strikes the fancy of your creative eye. Then, complete the drawing (FIG. 12.9). Make something out of the line you drew. Give the line meaning. Do with it whatever comes to mind (FIG. 12.10).

2. **Healing images:** Although art therapy has been used extensively with cancer patients, many other diseases and symptoms can be represented on paper. The following themes are ideas to enhance positive internal image, body awareness, and mental imagery.
 - a. *Draw yourself.* Sketch an image of yourself in a state of perfect health.



FIGURE 12.10 (A) Up from the unconscious comes a message of planetary healing as the earth is cradled by an external force. "The image that initially appeared was the classic figure of a young woman, as I let loose with quick orange strokes. As she emerged, the earth image felt needed—the blue circle/drum, then the need to offer healing, the desire to put in the breath and the Scandinavian herbal bundle as well. As I drew this, I started to cry." (B) Angered by all the cyber-noise (cacophony), this person drew himself "in the age of TRON," frustrated by the brave new, noisy world he finds himself in. "These days I cannot think for myself," he added.



- b. *Draw a picture of a part of your body you feel needs special attention.* Draw an area that you feel is perhaps a target organ of stress, one that shows signs of excessive wear and tear, or a part of your body that does not feel completely whole—for example, a headache, sore back, stomach cramps, clenched teeth. On another sheet of paper (or the back side), draw an image of this same body region fully healed. Use your imagination to restore this image to health through metaphor (e.g., a sock completely darned to represent a healed stomach ulcer).

3. **Mental images:** Art therapy can be a vehicle for mental imagery also. The images drawn provoke the mind to wander. For example:
 - a. *Draw a peaceful image.* Draw an image that makes you feel relaxed just by thinking about it. It can be a place you have been to that you would like to return to, if only on paper. It can also be a place you have never been to but have always wanted to go.
 - b. *Draw how you feel right now.* What emotion(s) are you feeling now? Anger, fear, guilt, worry, love, joy, peace? What does your anger look

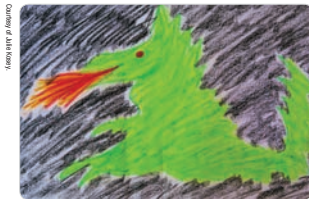


FIGURE 12.11 I created the dragon image first as an image that represented fear. (Workbook p. 111, #1. "Draw an expression of how you feel when you are either angry or afraid.") Then I chose "draw anything" and a beautiful flower emerged. (Workbook p. 111, #10 "Draw whatever you wish!"). When I looked at them together, to me the flower represented love overcoming fear (dragon).

like to you? How would you illustrate your feelings of love? Try to visualize your emotions on paper (FIG. 12.11).

- c. *Draw a dream image.* Try to include whatever fragments of a particular dream you can recall. Include the use of colors.

Interpretations

Interpretations are the hardest component of art therapy. They are difficult because there is wide latitude for impressions and understanding the figures, colors, shapes, and sizes that have made their way onto paper. Jung once said that the most important factor in dream analysis is the patient's impressions because dreams are the creation of the dreamer. Drawings and sketches are no different when it comes to interpretation. As a cathartic experience, interpretations of drawings are secondary to simply getting feelings down on paper.

Art therapists, and even psychologists who now use art therapy in their practices, engage in a fair amount of training to understand the commonalities, expressions of colors, and a host of other components of drawings (www.arttherapy.org). When interpreting the colors you have chosen, be careful to keep in mind both the context of the illustration and mood you were in when you drew the picture. For example, black is often used to represent death or grief, but for an African American, the color may also symbolize pride.

Interpretation is the search for understanding as the unconscious mind communicates to the conscious mind thoughts and feelings best described through a visual medium. In all art therapy sessions, patients are encouraged to explain their drawings to members of their group. Members, in turn, ask questions that may aid the artist in understanding his or her drawing. If done alone, a written description of the work helps with this process. But caution should be used when trying to interpret the meaning of your own artwork. First, go for the obvious. In the words of Freud, "Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar."

Best Application of Art Therapy

Art is a nonverbal expression of one's thoughts and feelings—expression that is not only necessary, but also therapeutic. There are many circumstances, in times of both ecstasy and torment, in which words do not adequately describe the full extent of our emotions. These are the times to employ art therapy. Remember that emotional well-being is defined as the ability to feel and positively express the full range of human emotions. Everyone, regardless of their levels of stress or chaotic life situations, can benefit from the use and practice of art therapy. As crazy as it may sound, keeping a box of crayons or colored pencils in your desk drawer is as important as having an address book or weekly planner (FIG. 12.12). If you don't have art supplies, it might be a good idea to obtain them (FIG. 12.13). And remember, pictures don't have to be masterpieces. They can start off as doodles.

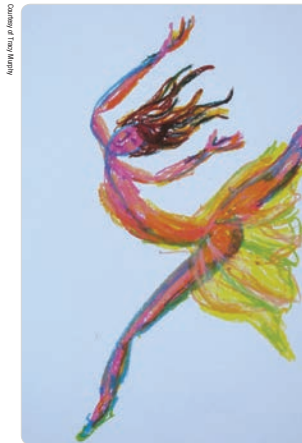


FIGURE 12.12 Selecting the theme: Close your eyes and draw a line, then open your eyes and finish the drawing, this person saw vitality and energy in the form of a dancer, expressing a freedom of movement, a feeling reinforced with color selection.



FIGURE 12.13 You don't have to be an artist to do art therapy. It's not about talent; it's about allowing the unconscious mind to speak through colors and images.

SUMMARY

- Art as a means of self-expression dates back to antiquity. Art therapy has its roots in Freudian and Jungian psychology, where illustrations were used to aid in understanding unconscious thoughts.
- In 1969, the American Art Therapy Association was established to educate and certify people in the skills of art therapy. Art therapy has since been introduced into a variety of settings, including counseling centers, hospitals, and addiction treatment centers, as well as nontraditional settings such as corporate wellness centers. It has proved an effective coping technique for all types of people to get in touch with their emotions in a nonverbal way.
- Art therapy is described as the creative use of art to provide for nonverbal expression and communication

through which to foster self-awareness and personal growth.

- Every stroke, every color, every detail has some relevant meaning at the unconscious level.
- There are varying opinions on the use of materials for art therapy, meaning that there is no preferred method. Crayons, pastels, colored pencils, finger paint, and clay are all possibilities. Art therapists do suggest that a wide variety of colors be available. Colors provide specific meaning to thoughts and unconscious messages.
- Art therapists offer a series of themes to explore in this type of nonverbal communication, including a picture of yourself, a fantasy animal, and a house with trees.

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

- Explain how art therapy is used as an effective coping technique.
- What archetypal meanings do colors represent or symbolize in art therapy?
- List several steps that help promote art therapy as a coping technique.

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CHAPTER 13

Humor Therapy (Comic Relief)

A good laugh and a long nap are the two best cures for anything.

—Irish Proverb

In 1964, a man admitted himself to a hospital for severe pain throughout his entire body. After a series of tests, he was diagnosed with a rare rheumatoid disease called ankylosing spondylitis, a progressive deterioration of the body's connective tissue. Chances for recovery were predicted to be roughly one in five hundred; the disease was quite advanced. Like most people, **Norman Cousins** decided to learn all he could about the etiology of his disease. He soon discovered that there is a strong correlation between stress, particularly negative perceptions and emotions, and his specific disease. So, the question occurred to him: If negative emotions such as guilt, worry, and anxiety are thought to be related to, and perhaps even promote, disease, is it possible for positive emotions to maintain health, or even restore one's health? He came to the conclusion that to increase his chances of recovery, he had to assume responsibility for his treatment. And that he did. He had nothing to lose.

With a defiant determination to recover and the support of his personal physician, Cousins checked out of the hospital and into a nearby hotel. He acquired copies

of humorous movies and TV shows, including those of Laurel and Hardy and the Marx Brothers. One of his friends, Alan Funt, even sent some classic clips from his hit TV show *Candid Camera*. Cousins later wrote in his now-famous book *Anatomy of an Illness* that “ten minutes of laughter allowed two hours of pain-free sleep.” After a time, he checked out of the hotel and went home; his disease had gone into remission. On the advice of his doctor, Cousins (1978) wrote up his story as a case history for the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Although he attributed his successful healing process to several factors, including large doses of vitamin C, the interpretation by those who read the article was

Norman Cousins (1915–1990): An author of the classic book *Anatomy of an Illness* (1976), he used humor to help heal himself from a serious disease and brought the importance of humor to the national consciousness in terms of mind-body-spirit healing, paving the way for the field of psychoneuroimmunology.

that Cousins literally laughed himself back to health. The man who is credited with revealing the positive side of psychosomatic medicine and validating the psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) movement often closed his speaking events on the healing power of humor with these words: “The more serious the illness, the more important it is for you to fight back, mobilizing all your resources—spiritual, emotional, intellectual, physical.”

Norman Cousins's story is now just one of many supporting the idea that positive emotions do indeed have healing effects on health. However, it was this single case study of comic relief, perhaps more than any other, that paved the road to a whole new field of study called PNI, and Cousins will always be remembered for his generous contribution to it. What has been learned since his hospital discharge is that positive emotions play an incredible role in maintaining the health of the human body. Humor therapy, or comic relief, is the use of humor to promote well-being through positive thoughts, attitudes, and emotions by counterbalancing the deleterious effects of negative thoughts, perceptions, and emotions on one's health. Humor as a coping technique is not a panacea for all ills, but it does provide benefits in a bad situation, whether in a hospital bed or outside a locked car, with your keys still in the ignition. Upon the death of legendary comic Bob Hope, who lived to be 100, his daughter, interviewed on the former talk show *Larry King Live*, noted that comedians and musical composers tend to live longer than most, most likely because of having a positive attitude.

Historical Perspective

Humor is a human magnet: It attracts all ears and minds. And laughter is a universal language, breaking through cultural barriers when words cannot. Cousins certainly was not the first person to use humor as a coping technique. Comic relief has been pondered since men and women first tickled their funny bones. The ancient Greeks held humor as a virtue. The philosopher Plato, for instance, believed humor nurtured the soul, and he advocated its use as a healing practice (Shelley, 2003). From the ancient Greeks came the formulas for theater, including comedy, still used today. And as

Humor: A perception of something funny or comical; not a mood, but a perception that can trigger a feeling or mood of joy and happiness.

far back as Old Testament times, people in the Middle East believed “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones” (Proverbs 17:22). In fact, humor as a “healing medicine” can be found at the root of virtually every culture on the globe, from the earliest practices of the native peoples of Africa to those of the Americas. It seems that humor and the viruses it helps to fight are equally contagious.

The word **humor** comes from a Latin word of the same spelling that means “fluid” or “moisture.” According to the physiology of the medieval period in Europe (the age of alchemy and potions), there were four basic body fluids, with each “humor” associated with a specific mood or general disposition. *Choler*, the yellow bile produced by the gallbladder, allegedly made one melancholy and depressed. Similarly, *black bile*, produced by the kidneys or spleen, was responsible for anger and hostility. A happy, cheerful spirit was associated with blood; while *phlegm*, produced by the respiratory system, was the reason behind apathy and sluggishness. If any one humor was produced in excess, it was thought to change mood, which put the individual at risk of social ridicule—*ergo*, the first comedians. If all body fluids were balanced, however, a person was said to be “in good humor.” Note, too, that the practice of blood letting, or draining the body of fluids to relieve symptoms and causes of these ailments, was a common practice in the United States as well as Europe until 1850. Sad to say, many a person died from melancholy, and a career as a physician was not looked upon with favor as it is today.

Intrigued with the use of humor as a healing agent, Dr. Raymond Moody surveyed several history books in 1978 to discover the following. In the year 1260, a progressive French physician, Henri de Moundeville, saw the important relationship between positive emotions and sound health, and made a practice of allowing family and friends to cheer and joke with their sick relatives. He wrote, “Let the surgeon take care to regulate the whole regimen of the patient's life for joy and happiness.” European monarchs also saw the importance of laughter, and often employed court jesters (those guys with funny shoes) to add mirth to their castle courts. Perhaps the most renowned court jester was Richard Tarlton, who was credited with keeping British Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603) in better health than did her team of physicians.

But laughter has not always been looked upon with favor. Europeans in the Middle Ages and Puritans on the eastern shores of North America, among others,

perceived laughter to be the work of the devil. People caught laughing out loud were often denounced as witches or believed to be possessed by Satan. The expression of humor was considered a sin in many Christian denominations. Other comments from those days about laughter (Moody, 1978):

Laughter on any occasion is immoral and indecent. Laughter obscures truth, hardens the heart, and stupefies understanding. A man of parts of fashion is therefore only seen to smile, but never heard to laugh.

—Lord Chesterfield, 1748

And if you look at the portraits of European nobility commissioned over a period of several hundred years, you are hard-pressed to find anyone smiling (except perhaps the Mona Lisa).

The words “say cheese” were not coined for use with the first camera in the nineteenth century, either; people were afraid of being caught sinning in public (FIG. 13.1). In fact, according to Allen Klein (1989), it was not until the twentieth century that people would risk a smile in a photograph.

Social norms are often influenced by figures of authority, so humor scholars have turned to the American presidency, a high-stress job, to observe the use of humor in the Oval Office. Lincoln was reported to use humorous stories in his political speeches and even read jokes to his cabinet during the Civil War period. Jimmy Carter once said to reporters at a press-conference dinner, “I’m not going to say anything important, so you can put your crayons away.” When Ronald Reagan, a politician known for his sense of humor, was brought to George Washington University Medical Center hospital after the assassination attempt on his life, he turned to the assembled medical team and said, “I hope you’re all Republicans.” And when Dan Quayle’s father said that his son studied only “booze and breads” in college, presidential candidate George H. W. Bush was heard to reply, “Not many students had a double major.” President Clinton’s jokes we cannot print in this book. And George W. Bush readily admits that it takes him 2 hours to watch *60 Minutes*. It appears that humor helps in the stressful role as president, too. Even President Obama has a sense of humor. When asked about the interest his teen daughters had in the former boy band the Jonas Brothers, he said, “I have two words for the Jonas Brothers: Predator drones.”

Times have changed since the days of Victorian prudery. With the help of the American and European



FIGURE 13.1 Because laughing and smiling were thought to be sins at the turn of the last century, no one did so in front of a camera for fear of being blackmailed with the proof.

entertainment industries, from vaudeville to Hollywood to television, the use of humor has gained wide acceptance throughout the world as a prominent factor in enhancing positive emotions. Slow to join this opinion until it had undisputable proof, the medical community now also accepts humor as a viable technique for health promotion and wellness. And it is Norman Cousins we have to thank for validating the use of humor as an authentic therapy in its own right.

Humor and comic relief are no less important now than when Cousins first checked into the hospital decades ago. Some would say that given the state of the world today, the need for comic relief is at an all-time high. Perhaps for this reason, a study was conducted in England in 2002 to determine the funniest joke—ever! A multitude of

submissions were sent via email from around the world and screened by a group of “experts.” The following joke was selected as one of the winners:

Famed fictional detective Sherlock Holmes and his gruff assistant Dr. Watson pitch their tent while on a camping trip. In the middle of the night, Holmes nudges Watson to wake him up.

Holmes: Watson, look up at the stars and tell me what you deduce.

Watson: I see millions of stars. And if there are millions of stars, even if a few of those have planets, it is quite likely there are some planets like earth. And if there are a few planets like earth, then indeed, there might be intelligent life, much like our own, Sir.

Holmes: Watson, you idiot, someone stole the tent!

Theories of Humor

For ages, perhaps longer, humankind has tried to understand just what it is that makes somebody laugh. As might be expected, no one answer appeared. To date, there are four major theories to explain the lighter side of human nature, as described by humor scholars Ziv (1984), Goldstein and McGhee (1972), and Bonham (1988). First, according to Steve Allen, Jr. (1990), “Humor is a physical release, one of four, actually. These include crying, yawning, orgasm, and laughter. You can do them in succession, just get the order right.” Where appropriate, I have included anonymously credited jokes from Novak and Waldok’s *Big Book of American Humor* (1990) to illustrate these theories.

Superiority Theory

Superiority theory, thought to be originated by Plato during the fourth century B.C., is the oldest theory attempting to explain people’s affinity for the ridiculous. When laughter occurs at the expense of someone else, as in mockery or ridicule, so that the end result is that the joker feels better than the object of ridicule, then the reason for laughter illustrates superiority theory (BOX 13.1). To laugh at someone else’s misfortunes gives slight, and temporary, comfort to our own condition. Typically, the greater the dignity of the object—for

Superiority theory: First coined by Plato describing the reason why people laugh is at other people’s expense.

BOX 13.1 Life in the Fast Lane: American Graffiti

- Just say NO to negativity!
- Money is the root of all evil. (For more information, send \$20 to me.)
- Never believe generalizations.
- Be different . . . like everybody else.
- Talk is cheap . . . until you hire a lawyer.
- If pro is the opposite of con, what is the opposite of progress?
- When life hands you gators . . . make Gatorade.
- Vegetarian: American Indian word for “lousy hunter.”
- Always try to be modest, and be proud of it!
- Warning: Dates on calendar are closer than they appear.
- Gravity—It’s not just a good idea, it’s the LAW!
- Duct tape is like the Force. There is a light side and a dark side and it holds the universe together.
- Never knock on Death’s door. Ring the bell and run, he hates that.

example, Tiger Woods and his sexual escapades, Queen Elizabeth picking her nose in public, and former President George W. Bush reading books upside down to preschoolers—the greater the laugh.

Superiority theory is also said to be the reason for negative and offensive humor. According to Goldstein and McGhee (1972), superiority theory explains aggression-based humor used to define and maintain ego boundaries. It is often used to boost or lower self-esteem, depending on which end of the joke you are on. At the extreme in this category are sarcasm and ethnic, sexist, racist, and even blonde jokes.

Incongruity (Surprise) Theory

On *Saturday Night Live*, parodies of commercials are a part of the format, and sometimes it takes a devoted fan to distinguish the real ads from the fake ones. A classic SNL commercial aired for a “Moms on Facebook” filter; a software program that, in the event your mother “friends” you, converts things you don’t want your

BOX 13.2 Comic Relief

A gentleman walks into a bank in New York City and asks for the loan officer. He says he is going to Europe on business for 2 weeks and needs to borrow \$5,000.

The bank officer says the bank will need some kind of security for such a loan. So, the gentleman hands over the keys to a new Rolls Royce parked on the street in front of the bank. Everything checks out, and the bank agrees to accept the car as collateral for the loan. An employee drives the Rolls into the bank’s underground garage and parks it there.

Two weeks later, the gentleman returns, repays the \$5,000 and the interest, which comes to \$15.41. The loan officer says, “We are very happy to have had your business, and this transaction has worked out very nicely, but we are a little puzzled. While you were away, we checked you out and found that you are a multimillionaire. What puzzles us is why you would bother to borrow \$5,000.” The gentleman replies, “Where else in New York can I park my car for 2 weeks for 15 bucks?”

mother to see into bland updates. It even converts the contents of uploaded photos.

Incongruity theory concerns two unrelated thoughts joined for a surprisingly comic effect (BOX 13.2). Humor arises because the mind just doesn’t expect the outcome. As eighteenth-century philosopher Immanuel Kant once said, “Laughter is the affliction arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing” (Robinson, 1991).

Ziv (1984) maintains that a surprise in the processing of information can best be described as incongruous, the juxtaposition of two strikingly different concepts (e.g., a Norwegian mariachi player). Oxymorons fall into this category. Humor and creativity are lifetime partners in incongruity theory. Koestler (1964) described this creative thought process as **bisociation**, the catalyst of humor, especially incongruous humor.

There are said to be two types of incongruities: ascending, or “ah ha,” which produces wonder and awe, and descending, or “ha ha,” which produces humor.

Thus, the incongruity theory is a cognitive-based theory necessitating the intellectual processing of information.

The formation of thoughts that do not fit the mold of pattern recognition trigger either a light-bulb effect or a smile.

Split-brain research on subjects who suffered cerebral strokes indicates that humor is most likely a right-brain function. In a study reported by Vera Robinson (1991), stroke patients with right-brain damage showed no sign of amusement at the punch lines of a series of hundreds of jokes. Incongruity theory suggests that the left brain tries to analyze the joke’s contents. When the punch line is revealed, the left brain is stumped and the right brain picks up the meaning, resulting in a laugh. But as Confucius said, “He who laughs last didn’t get the joke.”

Release/Relief Theory

Release/relief theory suggests that people laugh because they need to release nervous energy built up from repressed thoughts. This theory is credited to Freud. In his study of the psychology of humor, which included works by Mark Twain, Freud asserted that the act of laughter is a physical release or expression of sexual and hostile impulses suppressed by the conscious mind. He believed that the greater the suppression of these thoughts, the greater the laughter in response (BOX 13.3). Thus, humor, Freud postulated, is a reflection of underlying anxieties. Release/relief theory is applied to taboo humor, those subjects that are not socially acceptable in mixed company or professional settings. Freud’s theory

BOX 13.3 Comic Relief

Overheard in an airport men’s room—a guy talking on his cell phone in a bathroom stall: “Listen, I’m in the middle of some really busy paperwork that can’t wait. I’ll call you back in a bit. Bye!”

Incongruity theory: A theory that states the reason we laugh is because when two concepts come together in our head and they don’t make sense, we get a chuckle.

Bisociation: The ability to perceive two aspects to a situation, in this case, resulting in a laugh.

Release/relief theory: Freud’s theory of laughter is based on his concept that all laughter is the result of suppressed sexual tension, thus relieving it through humor.

attempted to explain the popularity of these jokes. Taboo subjects that include sexual references are “dirty jokes,” but jokes can come from other social taboos such as illegal drugs and questionable behavior, as shown on the bumper sticker “Cocaine addiction is God’s way of saying you make too much money.” Freud believed that humor was a “rare and precious gift,” and he called it the most advanced defense mechanism. (By the way, Twain was not impressed with this or many other of Freud’s theories.)

Divinity Theory

Although recognized intuitively for quite some time, the newest theory of the humor phenomenon is that it strengthens the spiritual nature of humanity. The **divinity theory** suggests that humor is a gift from God. In his book *Humor: God’s Gift*, author Tal Bonham supports his theory with a host of anecdotes, from stories in the Bible to well-researched case studies. The same theory is espoused by Cal Samra in his book *The Joyful Christ*. Humor, they believe, makes order out of chaos by dissolving threats (both anger and anxieties) to the ego (FIG. 13.2). Humor can also reveal the naked truth about topics people are often unable to address any other way; in the words of Chaucer, “Many a truth be told in jest.” Perhaps most important, humor has an adhesive quality that connects and bonds people together, if only for the duration of a joke, and connectedness is a component of spiritual well-being. This theory is also shared by the Dalai Lama, who advocates laughing and smiling as means to cleanse the spirit.

Humor, as Bonham explains, is God’s way of telling us we’re not perfect. Laughter and giggling are natural responses by children as they explore life. It is ironic that in a child’s first year, parents are elated when the baby smiles and giggles; in fact, these behaviors are strongly encouraged. But as children mature, they are told to wipe the smile off their faces, act their age, and stop laughing. A strong message may be received that the expression of humor isn’t appropriate or appreciated, to the detriment of their spiritual development.

There is also a connection between clowns and a divine presence in many cultures spanning the globe. Medicine men and shamans have dressed in funny outfits and



FIGURE 13.2 The divinity theory of humor becomes evident in cartoons like Bizarro.

acted in outrageous ways, which has been, and continues to be, regarded as clownlike in their respective cultures. A similar concept was adopted in Europe with the introduction of clowns in circuses as a form of entertainment. With an androgynous face mask or make-up that was neither male nor female, these people held the mystical power to heal. To this day, clowns still have this appeal and are used in hospital wards, especially in children’s hospitals throughout the United States (Miller and Blerkom, 1995). There is even a story that, years ago, in Sunday services held for employees of the Barnum and Bailey Circus, the altar boys were always the circus clowns. Does God have a sense of humor? Most theologians think (and hope) so.

It is quite possible for some of these theories to blend or combine together to explain the laughter response. For example, if the Queen of England were to tell a Polish joke (which she hasn’t done), it could be interpreted as an argument for superiority theory. However, laughter could also arise from the incongruity of this sense of humor among royalty, or even the release of anxiety from the perception of ethnic jokes as taboo. Despite the different theories as to why we laugh, one idea is agreed upon: Humor helps us cope with the stress of everyday life.

Types and Senses of Humor

For all the philosophical studies on the topic of humor—and there have been many—there has yet to be consensus on what humor really is. It encompasses so many facets and seems so profoundly complex that it has proved quite difficult to define succinctly. Most experts agree that humor is not itself a positive emotion, but that it can elicit positive emotions, including happiness, joy, love, faith, hope, and willpower. Humor is not a behavior, although it can produce actions (laughter and smiling) that are specific to its nature. Humor is best described as a perception, for as we all know and have experienced, what one person finds funny someone else does not. The following are two definitions to illustrate this elusive perception (McGhee, 1979):

1. Humor is “the mental experience of discovering and appreciating ludicrous or absurd ideas, events, or situations that bring pleasure or enjoyment to the individual.”
2. Humor is “the quality of being funny or appreciating funny thoughts or acts of behavior; the ability to perceive/enjoy what is funny or comical, a state of mind, feeling, or mood.”

It appears from the definitions that humor has two fundamental aspects. Simply stated, these are give and take. First, humor can be absorbed like a sponge, or experienced by internalizing this perception cognitively. Second, humor can be expressed externally through an action in an effort to share it with others. It is accepted that everyone has a sense of humor, although from your personal experience, you may think you have proof to deny this statement. Among those who have studied humor, McGhee (1979) cites three factors that must be present for humor to exist:

1. Sources that act as potential stimuli (e.g., a pie thrown in someone's face)
2. A cognitive and intellectual activity involved with the perception and evaluation of these sources (perceiving a faceful of whipped cream to be amusing)
3. Behavioral responses that are the expressions of humor (i.e., smiling or laughing)

Types of Humor

Perhaps the reason humor has been so difficult to define is that there are so many shades of it that can be internalized or expressed. Furthermore, types of humor overlap

and integrate with each other so that it is hard to separate them out sometimes. Although there are several theories of how humor can be categorized, I list them here in a particular order—parody first and sarcasm last—according to their efficacy at coping with stress. Everything between parody and sarcasm is fairly equal, and powerful in its own way, as either a subtle means to dissolve anger and fear, or to distract attention away from stress long enough for the body to return to homeostasis.

1. **Parody:** Parody is a work of humor that closely imitates something, or someone, for comical effect. Parody is typically a verbal or physical expression of humor bringing imperfections to light. This type of humor is considered to be one of the best, if not the best, types of humor to deal with stress, as long as it doesn't sacrifice self-esteem. Exaggerating behaviors and personality traits are examples. Good-natured parody, however, should not be mistaken for self-criticism expressed as an appeal for sympathy. When individuals can begin to parody and laugh at their own shortcomings, in their own minds, it will have the wonderful effect of reducing perceptions of stress. Celebrity “roasts” are probably the best-known parodies. *The Onion*, a national paper, and the former television show *Parks and Recreation* with Amy Poehler are also prime examples of parody.
2. **Satire:** Although satire and parody have many commonalities, satire is most often thought of as a written or dramatic expression of personal and social flaws. In the use of satire, many personal, political, and cultural quirks are described and exaggerated for humorous effect. America's most celebrated humorists, Art Buchwald, Erma Bombeck, Tom Robbins, P. J. O'Rourke, Molly Ivins, and Dave Barry, are well known for their styles of satire. Trevor Noah and Stephen Colbert are the epitome of late night political satire. *Saturday Night Live* skits are prime examples of satire, as are the movies *The Circle*, starring

Parody: A style of humor where something or someone is made fun of. Self-parody is thought to be the best type of humor to reduce stress.

Satire: A written or dramatic form of parody. Examples include the works of Bill Maher or Louis C.K., and the movie *Zootopia*.

Tom Hanks and Emma Watson, *Get Out*, and *Zootopia*.

3. **Slapstick comedy:** In the early days of American vaudeville, many actors used physical farce to generate laughs (FIG. 13.3). Slipping on a banana peel, getting a pie in the face, or reeling from a slap on the cheek was sure to get a rise out of the audience. While banana peels and cream pies were real, face slaps were faked. Behind the curtain stood a person making the sound effects. Originating in the French theater, the slapstick was a piece of leather nailed to a flat board. At the appropriate moment on stage, use of the slap stick would also produce laughs. The Marx Brothers, Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello, the Three Stooges, and Lucille Ball all had their professional roots in American vaudeville. Steve Carrell, Jim Carrey, and Amy Schumer are also well known for their slapstick comedy. Scholars note that slapstick comedy is an aggression-based humor through which audience members can release latent anger in a cathartic way (laughing) by watching someone else give and receive physical, yet harmless, blows.
4. **Absurd/nonsense humor:** Absurd or nonsense humor is described as two or more concepts that unite to result in a stupid, ludicrous, or ridiculous perception. Cartoonist Gary Larson's cartoon strip *The Far Side* depicting cows driving cars, sharks wearing horn-rimmed glasses, and cheetahs using vending machines on the Serengeti plain are all absurd. John McPherson's *Close to Home* strip conveys the same humor (FIG. 13.4). Steven Wright is to stand-up comedy as Gary Larson and Dan Piraro (*Bizarro*)



FIGURE 13.3 Many types of humor (irony, dry humor, even slapstick and bathroom humor) are written into the scripts of the hit show *Modern Family* (with some of the best scenes written for Ty Burrell's character), making the show a widespread hit. Jordan Peele (bottom photo above, left) and Keegan-Michael Key starred in the Comedy Central series *Key & Peele* for five seasons from 2012 to 2015 and continue to add comic relief to popular shows and movies.

are to cartoons, with a brand of absurd humor that has to be heard to be believed. Absurd or nonsense humor is also thought to be a good brand of humor to reduce stress because it acts as a diversion from the inundation of daily stressors. Take Monty Python, for example. Both styles put a gentle chaos back into the order of everyday thinking, making one realize that life shouldn't be taken too seriously.

5. **The double entendre:** The double entendre is a type of wordplay where the expression has two meanings (usually of a sexual nature). James Bond movies are filled with these verbal gags. Bumper stickers are

Slapstick: Originating from vaudeville, a physical farce such as getting a pie thrown in the face or slipping on a banana peel.

Absurd or nonsense humor: This type of humor is best exemplified by the works of Gary Larson's *The Far Side*. The comedian Steven Wright is also a prime example.

Double entendre: A joke that has two meanings.



FIGURE 13.4

notorious for these wordplays as well. Even Disney cartoons are written at two levels—for both kids and parents—where each laughs, but for what appears to be different reasons. Double entendres abound in everything from cartoons to political commentaries on Comedy Central. For example, Chris Rock notes that in determining legislation about the legalization of medical marijuana, both houses of Congress went into a joint session. Here is another example, in honor of Earth Day 2011: Clean up the Earth, it's not Uranus!

6. **Black humor:** Black humor is not a type of ethnic humor as some people are led to believe. Black, or “gallows,” humor is based on the fear of death. It is sometimes described as a “flirtatious brush with death.” Death is a common fear among human beings, and one way the human mind has devised to deal with this fear is to poke fun at it, attempting to become more comfortable with the concept, if only momentarily. Typically, during national tragedies, black-humor jokes surface as a way to cope with the gruesome reality of death, as was the case when jokes circulated immediately after the *Columbia* space shuttle explosion in 2003. Some of the best examples of black humor can be found in films and videos like the infamous

Harold and Maude and the more recent *Bad Santa 2*, *Horrible Bosses 2*, and *Bad Moms*. Much of the comic relief used in the television shows *Scream Queens* and *Fargo* express various shades of black humor. Cartoonists also make light of this phenomenon in their illustrations.

The dead as well as the living seem to have the last laugh, as expressed in the last words of American humorist Dorothy Parker (etched on her tombstone), “Pardon my dust.” In a survey of grave-stone epitaphs, Louis Schafer (1990) discovered that cemeteries are not devoid of tongue-in-cheek black humor either, as illustrated in the following examples:

John Strange
Here lies an honest lawyer.
This is Strange.

Here lieth the body of Martha Dias
Always noisy, not very pious.
Who lived to the age of three score and ten
And gave to worms what she refused to men.

Here lies John Bun, He was killed by a gun,
His name is not Bun, but Wood,
But Wood would not rhyme with gun, but Bun
would.

William Reese
This is what I expected, but not so soon.

Here lies the body of Susan Louder,
who died while drinking a seltzer powder.
Now she's gone to her heavenly rest,
She should have waited till it effervesced.

7. **Irony:** Irony is described as two concepts or events, which when paired together, come to mean or expose the opposite of the expected outcome (e.g., “Honk if you love peace and quiet”) (FIG. 13.5). Life is full of ironies: receiving a surprise check for one hundred dollars in the mail only to find a credit card bill for one hundred dollars the same day. Bumper stickers, such as “My other car is a broom,” often use irony. Irony can also be seen in everyday occurrences such as

Black humor: Humor about death and dying; thought to decrease fear of death.

Irony: A type of humor where the opposite from what was originally expected occurs.

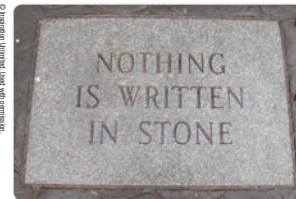


FIGURE 13.5 Humor in the form of irony is abundant in our lives. Keep your eyes open and you will see it everywhere.

buying four candy bars—and a Diet Coke. Oxymorons (two opposite concepts) provide yet another type of irony. Examples are working vacation, honest politicians, and jumbo shrimp. One of the best examples of irony I have ever heard, though, went like this (Klein, 1989): Charlie Chaplin once entered a Charlie Chaplin Lookalike Contest, and won third prize! Many stand-up comics, including George Lopez, Sarah Silverman, Louis C.K., Dave

Dry humor: Often found in storytelling (e.g., Garrison Keillor, Mark Twain), where the humor is subtle and clever.

Quick-witted humor: A style of humor that is based on quick wit without using sarcasm. Quick-witted humor often involves clever wording or phrasing that catches you off guard and leaves you impressed. Examples include the works of Mark Twain and NPR's “Car Talk” radio show.

Puns: A type of wordplay that may leave people sighing rather than laughing.

Bathroom humor: A form of humor often described as vulgar, crude, and tasteless, it derives its name from the use of various bodily functions known to occur in the bathroom.

Sarcasm: Thought to be the lowest form of humor, the word sarcasm means to tear flesh. Because sarcasm is a latent form of anger, it promotes rather than reduces stress.

Chappelle, and Aziz Ansari, use this type of humor in their acts, and playwright Neil Simon uses ironic twists in his films and Broadway plays. Native American humor includes a number of humor styles, particularly irony, including the works of Sherman Alexie, Gary Farmer, and Chris Eyre.

8. **Dry humor, quick wit, and puns:** Dry humor can be described as clever, esoteric wit. It often involves double entendres, words with more than one meaning or connotation (e.g., a Jewish zydeco band called So How's Bayou), frequently with sexual innuendo. Mark Twain, Will Rogers, Groucho Marx, Winston Churchill, the cast of Britain's *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, and, more recently, Garrison Keillor of *Prairie Home Companion* are fine examples of creators of esoteric wit. Click and Clack of NPR's “Car Talk” fame are examples of quick-witted humor, as is comedian Stephen Colbert. Puns, or plays on words, also fall into this category. It has often been said that puns are the lowest form of humor because, unlike clever wit, they border on the silly or inept. Actually, puns have no malicious intent and therefore are not the lowest form of humor. Some examples of puns follow:

- A pessimist's blood type is always B-negative.
 - I fired my massage today. She just rubbed me the wrong way.
 - A Freudian slip is when you say one thing but mean your mother.
 - I used to work in a blanket factory, but it folded.
- You may find it takes effort to laugh at puns, however, whereas other types of humor provoke laughter more spontaneously. Here's one: You can pick your friends and you can pick your nose, but you cannot pick your friend's nose.

9. **Bathroom humor:** If you have seen *American Pie*, *South Park*, *Spy* with Melissa McCarthy, or *Trainwreck* with Amy Schumer, then you know what bathroom humor is. If you haven't, the words vulgar, ruthless, crude, and irreverent come close to describing the topics of every body function imaginable chosen for cheap (and in some cases, hilarious) laughs.

10. **Sarcasm:** The word sarcasm means “to tear flesh,” and if you have ever borne the brunt of sarcasm, then you know all too well that this is a figurative yet accurate description. Although sarcasm may share

elements with clever wit, it reveals latent anger. It is an attempt to get verbal revenge. Sarcasm is perceived by its users to be a socially acceptable way to express hostile feelings through words rather than physical aggression, but words can hurt as much, if not more, than physical abuse, and the memory of it far exceeds that of physical pain. A sarcastic remark is typically followed by the punch line, "I'm just kidding," to take the sharp edge off the potential pain inflicted. Sarcasm is the lowest form of humor. Although sarcastic remarks may seem funny, they actually induce stress rather than relieve it in the person toward whom they are aimed. For this reason, sarcasm is not advocated as a vehicle for expressing humor. Almost everyone employs it to some extent, but its use should be minimized if not altogether abandoned.

Although types of humor have been compartmentalized into various categories here, for the most part, in practice they mix and blend together to form a score of permutations. Examples would be a sarcastic joke about death, or a parody of slapstick. It is equally difficult to neatly categorize senses of humor, or why individuals laugh at what they do.

Senses of Humor

Just as there is more than one type of humor, experts of humor research have identified several **senses of humor**. Senses of humor appear to be a function of one's upbringing and collective environments. Quite possibly, each individual has the makings for all the senses of humor, but one type tends to dominate in each personality. For this reason, it is complicated to give general advice on ways to improve one's sense of humor. In his book *Laugh after Laugh*, Dr. Raymond Moody identifies four categories describing most people's senses of humor:

1. **Conventional:** In the **conventional sense of humor**, two or more people find common ground by sharing a similar humorous perception and laughing at the same thing. Laughter occurs with someone, not at someone. There is a mutual appreciation for things that appear universally funny. Jay Leno's former sidekick, Kevin Eubanks, who laughed at nearly everything, might be an example of the conventional sense of humor.
2. **Life of the party:** While some people soak up humorous episodes like a sponge, others have the ability to provide laughable moments for the

amusement of everyone else. People with **life-of-the-party sense of humor** are the ones who wear the lamp shades at parties, recite numerous jokes and always remember the punch lines, and can tell any story and make it funny. These people love an audience and may have played the role of class clown in school in younger days. They are spontaneous, creative, and quick-witted. They have the ability to make everyone laugh, or at least smile. This is the kind of person you want to call up when you're feeling down and need to lift your spirits. Someone who pulls up alongside you at a red light, rolls down the window, and asks if you have any Grey Poupon mustard has this sense of humor.

3. **Creative:** The **creative sense of humor** is best observed in those whose professional career is joke writing. They are extremely quick-witted, very imaginative, and creative. These are people who can find humor in just about anything. People with the creative sense of humor frequently laugh to themselves, and if you ask them, "What's so funny?" they might tell you, or they might just say, "It was nothing." They are easily entertained. Although creative in their joke making, they often prefer to let someone else make the delivery. Anonymous graffitiists also fall into this category.
4. **Good sport:** A **good-sport sense of humor** is demonstrated by those who can laugh at their own foibles and mistakes and enjoy being human. These people know how to employ self-parody and make good use of it. With this style, laughter is used to cope with personal imperfections rather than rationalize pitfalls. These people can take a practical joke without calling

Senses of humor: A frame of mind as part of one's personality in how one uses humor and laughter in one's life.

Conventional sense of humor: A term to describe more than one person laughing at the same thing, all agreeing to its humor.

Life-of-the-party sense of humor: The class clown, the person who gets all the laughs.

Creative sense of humor: This describes a person who thinks of jokes or funny things, but may be shy to share them.

Good-sport sense of humor: This describes someone who can take a practical joke without suing.

a lawyer afterward. In the sense of good sportsmanship, the walls of the ego are low if not completely dissolved after a practical joke.

Group Laughter = Laughter Yoga

In 1995, a small group of people gathered together in a park in Mumbai, India, under the direction of a physician named Mandi Kataria. They came to laugh, and then laugh some more. Dr. Kataria named this activity "laughter yoga," and it spread like wildfire all over the globe, as described in his book *Laugh for No Reason*. What is laughter yoga? The simple explanation is that laughter yoga is prolonged voluntary laughter. In a typical session, people face each other, make eye contact, and engage in childlike behavior, causing smiles followed by laughter, and more laughter. Instructors begin sessions with stretching, clapping, and other body movements so participants will loosen up, and feel less self-conscious. Due to laughter's infectious nature, people in the group continue laughing for quite some time (as can be seen in the YouTube video "Contagious subway laughter"). In formal laughter yoga sessions, the laughter usually lasts for about 20 minutes. Sessions often end with laughter meditation where participants lie down and contemplate something funny (Briar, 2016).

■ Humor Therapy as a Coping Technique

In simplest terms, the use of humor is a defense mechanism. Yet, unlike other conscious or unconscious defense strategies to protect the ego, such as rationalization and projection, humor seems to dissolve the walls of the ego rather than intensify them. Humor is the one defense mechanism that can increase pleasure and reduce pain at the same moment; it gives two effects for the price of one. Theorists agree that humor is an adaptive coping mechanism liberating the ego. A 1978 article in *Psychology Today* asserted that the average person laughs about fifteen times per day. Although this study has not been updated, one might infer, given the state of the world today, that the quota of fifteen laughs per day is not being met. Humor's greatest asset is to balance the emotional scale between positive and negative perceptions. Although the study of psychology has maintained a particular bent toward the darker side of the human psyche, even this is beginning to change, in both the focus of research and the application of psychotherapy. Many psychologists argue that the expression of laughter and smiling is nothing less than a catharsis of emotions, a physical release tied to

emotional thoughts. Overall, a well-intended catharsis can be quite healthy to the mind and body. But the complexity of humor hints of something more than just catharsis. In any event, mirth serves as a catalyst to unite mind, body, and spirit for total well-being.

It may seem intuitively obvious that humor can be used to diffuse stress, which is proven by the effectiveness of humor therapy. Over the years, a handful of studies have been conducted to measure the effects of humor (laughter) on stress, all with positive results. Miller and Fry (2009) studied the effect of mirthful laughter on the cardiovascular system and found that the release of beta-endorphins has a beneficial effect on the heart and vascular system. Bennett et al. (2003) investigated the effect of mirthful laughter on stress and natural killer cell activity. They concluded that positive emotions derived from laughter likely have a positive effect on the immune system and that laughter is a recommended cognitive-behavioral intervention. In a study to determine the efficacy of clown therapy (humor) on children undergoing surgery, Fernandes and Arriaga (2010) found that this type of humor not only helped the children cope better with anxiety, but also helped the parents.

Viktor Frankl, an Auschwitz survivor, noted in his book *Man's Search for Meaning* that humor was a saving grace among fellow prisoners in the shadows of death. Frankl wrote, "Humor was another of the soul's weapons in the fight for self-preservation." Fear of death even has its own brand of mirth: black humor. People often joke about death and dying in an effort to ease their tension and perhaps better understand their own mortal plight. Hollywood often uses comic relief in horror movies (e.g., *28 Days Later* and *Scary Movie*) so that the audience isn't so emotionally spent that they miss the film's climactic scene. It is virtually impossible to be both angry and happy at the same time. Thus, if you can separate yourself from your aggression for a moment and see how silly and out of character prolonged anger really is, feelings of hostility dissipate, succumbing to a crescendo of mirth. For this reason, self-parody is thought to be the type of humor best suited to dispel anger.

In the book *The Healing Power of Humor*, Klein states that the use of humor gives a sense of power in the midst of chaos. Being able to make light of a stressful circumstance allows people to feel they have control over a situation. Humor becomes a weapon to disarm the cause of the stress response. Whereas some consider humor as a catalyst to tap the power of intelligence and emotional fortitude, others see it as a diversion tactic. In this case,

humor allows for an intermission in the cognitive war against stressors and a "cease-fire" of the stress response. The use of **humor therapy** in several hospital settings, as noted by Norman Cousins (1989) in his book *Head First*, helps to alleviate the sterile atmosphere these institutions are known for by allowing cancer patients to momentarily forget intravenous tubes, chemotherapy, radiation treatments, and bedpans.

In an attempt to better understand humor appreciation, *Psychology Today* conducted a survey of its readers in 1978. Thirty jokes were printed along with a questionnaire to gauge readers' opinions of the jokes' quality and laughability. More than 14,000 questionnaires were returned, and responses varied as much as the styles of jokes printed. Humor, like beauty, is a relative concept. The study concluded that sexual humor was the most popular topic of jest, with ethnic humor running a close second. Humor scholar Avner Ziv (1984) offers two reasons why sexual humor remains so popular. First, the craving for sexual humor compensates for the continuous desire to physically satisfy this basic human drive. Second, sexual humor may compensate for the disappointment of unmet sexual expectations.

Comic relief is currently used as a mode of therapy in many rehabilitation programs, including the treatment of physical trauma, alcoholism, and drug addiction. Psychologists who recognize the effectiveness of humor and utilize comic relief with their patients identify it as both an assessment tool, to indicate values, inner feelings, and meaning in life, and a therapeutic tool, to encourage a cathartic release of emotions. In psychotherapy, it is the patient's own use of humor that is nurtured and encouraged; it is not initiated by the therapist. When patients begin to joke about their conditions or predicaments, it is acknowledged as a breakthrough in the emotional self-healing process. Once manifested, the practice of comic relief is encouraged during laughable moments. Humor has been found to be very effective in aiding patients through the transitions of the many stages of recovery.

Just like other coping techniques that can prove ineffective for resolution, the power of humor can be abused. Negative and offensive humor such as racial, ethnic, and sexist humor, as well as sarcasm in both its delivery and reception, do not lend themselves to satisfaction as coping mechanisms. Negative humor may inflate self-esteem, but it is a false inflation with no lasting value. Humor can also be used as a means of seeking approval by controlling other people's attitudes and making them feel good. Used in this manner, humor takes on an

addictive quality, where each laugh becomes a "fix" leading to the next laugh. Thus, humor employed to win the approval of others takes on the quality of codependent behavior. In a study by Fisher and Fisher (1983) investigating the personalities of comedians, it was observed that many professional comedians and humorists were raised in less-than-ideal environments, including homes with alcoholic parents (Carol Burnett), orphanages (Charlie Chaplin, Art Buchwald), or broken families. In these cases, the use of humor often brought recognition, approval, and a feeling of self-validation. In her book *It's Always Something*, comedian Gilda Radner described her use of comedy as an occasionally negative behavior: "Comedy is very controlling—you are making people laugh. You feel completely in control when you hear a wave of laughter coming back that you have caused. Probably that's why people in comedy can be so neurotic and have so many problems. Sometimes we talk about it as a need to be loved, but I think that with me it was also a need to control."

Comedian Ricky Gervais said it best when he said, "Humor guides you through the uncomfortable places. That is what humor is for—it gets us through the bad stuff." As a coping technique, humor therapy has the immediate effect of increasing awareness of the cause of stress, which may then lead to the path of resolution. The greater the quantity of laughs and the quality of humor, the greater the sensation of pleasure. The long-term effects of comic relief as a coping mechanism at best remain a mystery, particularly because these have not been investigated to any great degree.

■ The Physiology of Laughter

Norman Cousins was right: Positive emotions augment the mind-body relationship. Laughter indeed influences the body's physiology, resulting in restoration and possibly healing. In his own clinical tests, Cousins noted that several hours of laughter produced a small but significant decrease in the sedimentation rate of his blood, a predictor of inflammation or infection. In *Anatomy of an Illness*, Cousins (1976) wrote, "The drop itself (five points) was not substantial, but it was cumulative." Once thought of

Humor therapy: A coping technique; the use of humor and comic relief as a means to relieve and reduce emotional stress by focusing on the funny, humorous, and positive aspects of life.

as only a coping technique, humor therapy now qualifies as a relaxation technique as well because of its physiological effects. Since this discovery, scientists have investigated the mysteries of the immune system and its relationship to the experience and expression of various emotions.

Dr. William Fry has devoted his life to the investigation of this mind-body relationship, and his work has yielded some fascinating results. Laughter appears to have both short-term and long-term effects on the body's major physiological systems. In the short term, a bout of laughter appears to initiate the stress response, with a slight increase in heart rate, blood pressure, muscle tension, and ventilations. But this is quickly followed by a rebound effect, where these parameters decrease to below previous resting levels. The overall effect is a profound level of homeostasis, much like that seen when progressive muscular relaxation is practiced. In the short term, laughter is credited with stabilizing blood pressure, "massaging" vital organs, stimulating circulation, facilitating digestion, and increasing oxygenated blood throughout the body. As Fry (1986) stated, "Laughter is clearly related to the reduction of stress and the physical symptoms related to stress."

Fry also conducted a series of studies on the composition of tears, those shed from pain and laughter as well as those artificially induced (e.g., from cutting onions). His research revealed that the constituents of emotional tears include a greater percentage of proteins and toxins than those produced artificially. Fry concluded that tears resulting from emotional responses serve to rid the body of stress-related toxins. Once again, this suggests that physical expressions—both laughter and crying—are natural and healthy to the well-being of the individual. As author Kurt Vonnegut once quipped (Klein, 1989), "Laughter and tears are both responses to frustration and exhaustion. I myself prefer to laugh, since there is less cleaning up to do afterward."

Perhaps more impressive than the short-term effects of laughter are its long-term effects. Through the new multidiscipline of PNI, researchers are now finding that the immune system plays an ever-increasing role in the mind-body relationship. In the words of Bernie Siegel (1986), "Thoughts are chemicals; they can either kill or cure." It appears that thoughts and perceptions are quickly transformed in the brain into chemical reactions that have impact throughout the body. Negative thoughts actually trigger the neural release of the stress hormones and suppress the immune system. Positive thoughts strengthen the integrity of the immune system

by inducing the release of special neuropeptides from the pituitary gland and other tissues located throughout the body. Neuropeptides—endorphins, interleukins, and interferons, to name a few—act as messenger molecules to various organs throughout the body.

Recent research has revealed that neuropeptides are also manufactured and released by the lymph nodes and other components of the immune systems. Although several hundred neuropeptides have been discovered to date, scientists believe there may be many more acting in the interest of the body's immune system. In effect, laughter causes the body to produce its own painkillers. As studied by David McClelland (McClelland and Kirshnit, 1989) measured changes in secretory immunoglobulin A (S-IgA), a salivary immune-defense agent, as a result of three emotional responses (humor, cynicism, and trust) elicited by three types of movies. Films of W. C. Fields and Mother Teresa produced a significant rise in S-IgA, while a Nazi propaganda film corresponded with a decrease. The long-term effects of humor and the positive emotions it produces may serve as one of the most beneficial health practices currently known to humanity. It would be unwise to suggest that humor-induced laughter can cure all ailments; this simply isn't true. But humor can "lighten the load," making the pain of some diseases more bearable. In some remarkable incidences, such as that reported by Norman Cousins, there may also be a true healing effect. There are currently too many missing pieces to complete the mind-body model to our full comprehension. But in the short time that humor therapy has been employed as a therapeutic agent in cancer wards, many patients have been given the opportunity to die with a smile instead of a lonely frown. And their loved ones have that fond memory to look back on.

■ Steps to Initiate Humor Therapy

Years ago, I designed and taught an experimental course entitled *Humor and Health*. At least once a week, students asked me how they could improve their sense of humor. From the volumes of resources I read in preparation for this course, I gleaned a number of ways to incorporate humor therapy into your arsenal of stress-management coping techniques. The best suggestions are as follows.

1. **Learn not to take life too seriously.** Chris Flanagan, R.N., is the former head nurse on the oncology unit at Shady Grove Adventist Hospital in Rockville,

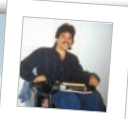
Stress with a Human Face

It was a hot summer day, and the pool looked so inviting. Andrew was a bright, good-looking, athletic kid about to enter high school. That day, he and his younger brother were making the most of their summer freedom. The odds of what was about to happen were about as great as winning \$20 million in the lottery, except Andrew wasn't that lucky. For some reason no one seems able to explain, the angle at which he entered the deep water was just enough to snap his second vertebra and paralyze him from the neck down. Within the blink of an eye, *freedom* became a word he would cry over. And cry he did. In his therapy, he withdrew into his own world of darkness.

But one of his nurses had a natural funny bone that reverberated in its enthusiasm, and in time it became infectious. Soon Andrew asked to have some cartoon books

brought in to him, as well as some comedy videos. His bouts of depression became fewer and fewer. It seemed that with his change in attitude came a desire to leave the hospital and get back to as normal a life as could be expected.

If you could see Andrew today, you would be drawn immediately toward his smile, an attribute he cherishes. Oh, he still has his downtimes like the rest of us, but he will be the first to tell you of the healing power of humor and how it enabled him to cope with a stressor he would have never imagined facing that fine summer day. Currently, he is a self-proclaimed ambassador of humor therapy for the disabled, traveling around the country to share his stories of comic relief. The newest joys in his life are his wife, Lauren, and their daughter, Alexis.



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Maryland. Chris was awarded a grant from the Hyatt Foundation to start a Humor Cart on her cancer ward. Describing her work, Chris said, "We have a policy on my floor: Take your work seriously, but take yourself lightly." Most oncology wards have high turnover rates among nursing staff, but this philosophy has kept the nursing staff at Shady Grove intact for several years now. In a nutshell, this attitude means seeing yourself as more than your work. Many times we place all our eggs in the career basket, and if we have a bad day at work, then our self-esteem withers away. See yourself as a whole person, with many aspects and talents, not just as a student, spouse, or professional. People who are able to laugh at their mistakes are considered more emotionally sound than those who fret at the slightest hint of imperfection. We start out in life as a square block. Through a multitude of life's experiences, we polish the rough edges and, by the end, finish up a gem.

2. **Find one humorous thing a day.** Humorous events and concepts are around us all the time. Life is full of ironies, incongruencies, and just plain funny stuff. One's frame of mind is either receptive to these or simply dismisses them. If humor is a perception, as is currently believed, then the way to adopt comic relief as a coping mechanism is to

adopt this humorous frame of mind and make it your own (cognitive restructuring). It is commonly understood that if you make yourself consciously aware of and receptive to an idea, you will attract things to reinforce this perception many times over. Take planning a holiday, for example. You decide that this summer you want to go on a safari in Kenya. Once you commit yourself to the trip, you discover all kinds of people who have gone on safari with the same touring company, you start noticing ads in magazines and TV specials, and your mind becomes a magnet for news and ideas about Africa. The same can be done with humor, if you make yourself receptive to the lighter side of life. Tell yourself that you want to find one funny thing each day. You will find that instead of just one little tickle, you will discover a wealth of humorous experiences each and every day (BOX 13.4). In addition, allocate some fun time for each day, whether this means watching a funny YouTube video, reading comics, or going to your nearest comedy club.

It is important to remember, however, that there are times when it is inappropriate to laugh. People can interpret laughter as rude during serious moments, so use caution and judgment. On the other hand, life is full of *laughable moments*, when it is

BOX 13.4 American Graffiti

A bunch of inmates gathered together every Friday afternoon after basketball practice to tell jokes and lift their spirits. Because they had been together so many years, rather than telling the actual joke, they assigned a number to each joke. Some guy would call out a number and the group would laugh, sometimes uncontrollably. One day a new inmate joined the group and after observing the process of joke telling, yelled out the number 9. No one laughed! After a few moments, one inmate muttered under his breath, "Jeez, some people just can't tell a joke."

Comedian's lament: "I don't have health insurance. Too expensive . . . and I was told I have a pre-existing condition."

But I do have a good car insurance policy. It's the law! So whenever I come down with the flu or start to bleed, I get in my car and drive around looking for an accident."

Three elderly men are at the doctor's office for a memory test. The doctor asks the first man, "What is three times three?" "274," came the reply. The doctor rolls his eyes and looks up at the ceiling, then says to the second man, "It's your turn. What is three times three?" "Tuesday," replies the second man. The doctor shakes his head sadly, then asks the third man, "Okay, your turn. What's three times three?" "Nine," says the third man. "That's great!" says the doctor. "How did you get that?" "Simple," he says, "just subtract 274 from Tuesday."

quite acceptable to laugh and smile. When these times arise, capitalize on them and give yourself permission to let go and enjoy.

3. **Work to improve your imagination and creativity.** Creativity and humor are virtually inseparable. One has only to read headlines in supermarket tabloids to be reminded of this: "Termite Baby Eats Newsworld's House," "Bigfoot Seen Boarding a UFO," "Ski Mask Found on Surface of Mars," "Teenager Swallows Seed, Grows Palm Tree in Stomach." Lately, the creative "muscle" of many an American has atrophied as the adrenal glands have hypertrophied. Remember, the funny bone is just as susceptible to the general adaptation syndrome as is your adrenal gland. Start placing more emphasis on this target organ. It is commonly thought (and currently under study) that the use of one right-brain cognitive function enhances other functions of the same hemisphere. Imagination is a right-brain function. So is humor. They tend to feed off each other. So how does one augment imagination skills? Here are a few suggestions:
 - a. **Read more books (fiction and nonfiction) and watch less television.**
 - b. **Write a story, fable, or poem every now and then.**
 - c. **Play with children.** Kids have wonderful imaginations. Maybe some of theirs will transfer to you by osmosis. Get closer to the earth. Observe the world from the eye level of a young child.

- d. **Go exploring.** Do something completely new and outrageous. Spend an afternoon in a hardware store, a museum of fine art, or a greenhouse. Get out of the comfortable rut you take refuge in and discover the world all over again.

- e. **Create something.** Pull out a cookbook and play "Wolfgang Puck." Make your own holiday presents this year. Invent something. Plant a garden. Bonsai a tree. Plan a trip around the world. Start a new hobby. Make your world a better place to live in.

4. **Start a joke/cartoon-of-the-week swap with a friend.** Use either Twitter, Facebook, or email so that you have something to look forward to, as well as making someone else's day with a chuckle.
5. **Learn to hyperexaggerate when describing a situation or story.** A comedian begins his monologue, "I knew a guy so ugly . . ." and a call comes back from the audience, "How ugly was he?" The comedian continues, "He was so ugly that if you were to look up the word *ugly* in the dictionary, you'd find his picture beside the definition." Exaggeration is a staple in virtually all comedians' joke repertoires. Comparisons are hilarious when they are exaggerated, and they can lighten up the description of the most stressful event. Ways to employ exaggeration include substitution of familiar words with others (e.g., since your last communiqué . . .) and use of figurative versus literal meanings (e.g., Why do

we drive on a parkway, and park on a driveway?). Creative use of metaphor is also a component of exaggeration for a good laugh, as in "My final in economics was worse than the Spanish Inquisition."

6. **Build a humor library.** One of the essentials of coping is the use of available resources, which can include anything and everything. For humor therapy, resources involve the collection and use of books, CDs, and DVDs, and even hand buzzers and water guns. Designate a small corner of your home for a humor library and start to fill the shelves with a collection of every conceivable resource. Online streaming services have designated comedy sections; bookstores have humor sections. No matter how often you have heard favorite CDs or read favorite books, they will still trigger a laugh. Don't let these resources collect dust, either. Make a habit of using them frequently.

Here is another idea: Start a **tickler notebook**. Buy a notebook and fill it with anything that puts a smile on your face (BOX 13.5). It can include, among other things, cartoons, favorite jokes, letters, funny photographs with your captions attached, favorite

newspaper columns, love poems, and a host of personal items (e.g., JPEGs/photographs, birthday cards, postcards) that make you feel good inside. When I assign the tickler notebook to my Humor and Health students, I give these instructions: "Imagine that one day you are diagnosed with a major illness (e.g., cancer). What humor time capsule can you assemble that upon review is bound to jack up your white blood cell count and put you on the road to recovery?" We all have down moments; this is perfectly natural. But an extended period of negative emotions is neither natural nor healthy. A tickler notebook is your personal humor prescription. And it is a growing organism; keep feeding and looking after it. Treat it well, and it will repay you a hundred times over.

7. **Find a host of varied humor venues.** Telling jokes is only a pebble of the mountain we call humor,

Tickler notebook: A personal collection of humorous items (e.g., cards, letters, JPEGs, jokes) to lighten your spirits.

BOX 13.5 Classic Jokes for Your Tickler Notebook

The Good Son

An old man lived alone in Idaho. He wanted to spade his potato garden, but it was very hard work. His only son, Bubba, who always helped him, was in prison for armed robbery. The old man wrote a letter to his son and mentioned his predicament:

Dear Bubba, I'm feeling pretty low because it looks like I won't be able to plant my potato garden this year. I've gotten too old to be digging up a garden plot. If you were here, my troubles would be over. I know you would dig the plot for me. Love, Dad.

A few days later, the old man received a letter from his son:

Dear Dad, For HEAVEN'S SAKE, don't dig up the GARDEN! That's where I buried the GUNS and the MONEY! Love, Bubba.

At 4:00 A.M. the next day, a dozen FBI agents and local police officers showed up at the old man's house and dug up the entire area. After finding nothing, they apologized

to the old man and left. That same afternoon the old man received another letter from his son:

Dear Dad, Go ahead and plant the potatoes now. It's the best I could do under the circumstances. Love, Bubba.

The Conversation

God is sitting in Heaven when a scientist says to Him, "Lord, we don't need you anymore. Science has finally figured out a way to create life out of nothing. In other words, we can now do what you did in the beginning."

"Is that so? Tell me about it," replies God.

"Well," says the scientist, "we can take dirt and form it into the likeness of You and breathe life into it, thus creating man."

"Well, that's interesting. Show me."

So the scientist bends down to the earth and starts to mold the soil.

"No, no, no," interrupts God. "Get your own dirt."



Courtesy of Patch Adams, M.D.

FIGURE 13.6 Patch Adams, M.D., has dedicated his career in the healing profession to making health care free and nonhierarchical for all people in a loving playful hospital. So to use humor as both a context for medical practice and for living life, he sees clowning as a trick to bring love close. Sharing humor seems to multiply the effects of laughter on well-being. Here Adams is with refugee children from the former Yugoslavia.

yet it is often the first thing we think of when we hear the word. But humor can be found in a multitude of venues, and the greater the access to a wide variety of humor media, the more advantageous this coping skill will be to deal with stress (FIG. 13.6). Humor venues include (but are not limited to) movies, theater, books, music, television, and live stand-up comedy. Humor and entertainment are also very compatible, if not always the same. The human mind likes to be entertained. Be on the lookout for ways to incorporate a wide variety of humor venues into your lifestyle.

8. **Improve your self-esteem.** It is hard to laugh when your self-esteem is deflated. At times, we all think we are fat, ugly, or stupid, and these characteristics constitute the punch line of many a joke. Low self-esteem derives from negative feedback we create in our own minds and come to believe. Remember Einstein's theory: Everything is relative. Separate fact from fiction. Give yourself positive affirmations every day, accentuate your good qualities, and learn to accept and love yourself and all your human potential.

9. **Access your humor network.** Every now and then, there are bound to be times when you find yourself on the bottom rung of the emotional ladder. These moments should be recognized and, perhaps for a short time, even appreciated. But if, after an allocated period of "emotional downtime," you need some help getting up again, don't be afraid to call for help. We all know someone who can make us smile at the mere thought of his or her name. Call this person and ask for a "humor lift." It's the next best thing to being there. Conversely, it would be a good habit to minimize time spent with people who seem to live with black clouds over their heads; their pessimism is not conducive to enhancing your positive emotions. You don't have to go down with their ship.

Best Application of Comic Relief

Humor therapy integrates a little cognitive reappraisal, a little behavior modification, and a lot of fun. Employing comic relief as a coping style involves a conscious effort to

live life on the lighter side. Humor therapy does not try to eclipse the emotions associated with anger, fear, or sadness; it only attempts to neutralize them so that there is balance to your emotional responses. To best apply the use of humor in your life, take note of what sense of humor you best identify with and see if you can sharpen this edge a little. Also note which type of humor you find most gratifying and make a habit of employing more of it in the course of each day. In addition, monitor your high and low moods and their durations. If you find that the majority of your thoughts are negative, jaded, or laced with pessimism, try to balance these out with a greater

number of positive, even humorous, thoughts. No one who advocates humor therapy suggests that everybody should always be smiling. This is neither realistic nor healthy. Emotional well-being is the ability to feel and express the *full* range of human emotions, both positive and negative. The danger lies in the imbalance of positive and negative emotions because a preponderance of the latter will ultimately inflict bodily damage. Cousins highlighted humor as a symbol of all the positive emotions that can lend themselves to emotional well-being. Use humor therapy to find and maintain that balance of human emotions in your life.

SUMMARY

- Cousins legitimized the use of humor therapy when he treated himself with hours of funny films, which contributed to the remission of his potentially fatal disease. The premise of the therapy was that if negative thoughts can result in illness and disease, positive thoughts should enhance health. Cousins also believed that for his health to return he had to take personal responsibility for it.
- Greeks advocated humor therapy more than 2,000 years ago, as did ancient Africans, American Indians, and medieval European kings and queens. However, laughter was declared by the Puritans to be the work of the devil, and to laugh or smile was considered a sin.
- Humor is not a positive emotion, but it can elicit several positive emotions. Humor, like stress, is a perception.
- Humor is a very complex phenomenon. There are many types of humor, including parody, satire, slapstick, absurd/nonsense, black, irony, dry, and sarcasm. Self-parody is thought to be the best type

of humor to reduce stress, whereas sarcasm is the worst.

- Just as there are different types of personalities, there are also several senses of humor, including conventional, life of the party, creative, and good sport.
- There is no one accepted reason why we laugh. Four theories attempt to explain the nature of the funny bone: superiority theory, incongruity (surprise) theory, release/relief theory, and divinity theory.
- Research investigating the psychoneuroimmunological effects of laughter have found that there is a strong relationship between good health and good humor. In essence, laughter helps restore physiological homeostasis.
- Studies also show that humor promotes mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being.
- There are many ways to tickle your funny bone and augment your sense of humor, but like anything that is worth having, you have to work at it.

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. How is humor best defined?
2. List five different types of humor.
3. List the four theories of humor (why we smile/laugh). Each humor theory can be associated with one component of the wellness paradigm (mind, body, spirit, emotions). Which goes with which?
4. How do humor and laughter work together as a coping technique for stress?
5. List four ways to incorporate more humor and laughter into your life.

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CHAPTER 14

Creative Problem Solving

Make it a practice to keep on the lookout for novel and interesting ideas that others have used successfully. Your idea only has to be original in its adaptation to the problem you are working on.

—Thomas Alva Edison

Light bulb. Bicycle. Printing press. Airplane. Cotton gin. Telephone. Laptop. iPad. Smartphone. Airbnb. Uber. Snapchat. Each one has become an item of necessity. Necessity, it is said, is the mother of invention, and the human mind has risen to the occasion to create some fantastic inventions. There is no better time for necessity to bear the fruits of creativity than during times of frustration or crisis, when one needs to get from point A to point B. If you have been following any of the news headlines recently then you are well aware that the world has no shortage of problems today. Problem solving requires both a personal and planetary effort, giving credence to the expression, if you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem (Meng, 2016).

At one time, the United States took pride in its American ingenuity. Young in age and pregnant with possibilities,

early generations of Americans made more improvements to the proverbial mouse trap than there are stars in the sky. Before the turn of the twentieth century, the United States was a productive society, the vast majority of its citizens making more than 70 percent of their household items themselves. As the country became a consumer society, however, more and more items were bought rather than made at home. The availability of several new inventions, like the washer and dryer, provided more leisure time. But with some of these inventions, lifestyles became very comfortable, and our collective creative skills became dull (Bronson and Merryman, 2010). With the advent of television, it is said, the creative American mind began showing signs of atrophy. People now take a passive role in the creative process, letting other people do the important creative problem solving.

You may have heard of the IQ test, but have you heard of the CQ test? CQ stands for creative intelligence. The test was designed by Paul Torrance in the 1950s and is still used today. Experts have noted that while IQ scores have increased, as a whole, over the years, CQ scores in America have decreased, leading many experts to suggest that American ingenuity is in dramatic decline. The blame seems to lie with too many hours in front of the television and video games and too much emphasis on school testing. Creativity is a skill, however, and skills can be learned and cultivated. Mark Runco, who directs the Torrance Center for Creativity and Talent Development at the University of Georgia, found that people who utilize their creative muscles with regard to problem solving have better relationships and, through the empowerment of creativity, are better able to handle stress when problems, big or small, arise (Bronson and Merryman, 2010; Blair, 2013).

Experts agree that a happy mind is a creative mind. The inability to deal with many problems is directly related to the inability to tap into and utilize creativity. It would be unfair to point the finger of blame solely at television or video games. Many critics believe that the American educational system continues to play a role in the decline of creative skills as well, by stifling the limits of imagination with conformity and critical-thinking skills (FIG. 14.1). Moreover, American companies are now looking to hire Asians who are deemed more creative. The dominant style of thinking in the Western hemisphere is considered left-brained: linear, logical and rational, analytical, and judgmental. Left-brain modes of thinking are those most rewarded in both school and work environments. And this style of thinking has devalued recreational and play time.

Music. Poetry. Architecture. Fiction. Art. Pottery. Photography. If necessity is the mother of invention, then play can be said to assume the paternal role in this relationship. Creativity definitely has a playful, relaxed side to it. Playing is as much a part of human nature as is work, although playful behavior often atrophies as individuals make the transition from childhood to adulthood. But play, like the creativity it stimulates, can be nurtured. It has been said that more good ideas have arisen from play in garage and basement workshops than anywhere else, including the genesis of Xerox Corporation, Hewlett-Packard, and Apple Computers. Why is creativity so important? Why do corporate executives currently pay big bucks to bring in creative consultants to conduct workshops for their employees? The answer can be summed up in one word: change.

Change is inevitable. There is comfort in familiar routines, even if they are boring or stressful. Change meets resistance. Someone once said that the only person who likes change is a wet baby. But we live on a planet that travels at a rate of 66,000 miles per hour in its ellipse around the sun, with a population approaching 7 billion people. Given these dynamics alone, change is inevitable. In 1970, Alvin Toffler wrote a book, *Future Shock*, describing the rapid changes the human race would encounter in the age of high technology by the end of the twentieth century and beyond. The book might have been titled *Future Stress* because, as Toffler indicated, the shock from rapid change can be very difficult to handle, and even more difficult to adapt to. Resistance to change seems to be a basic part of human nature. Change is often equated with chaos, and chaos spells stress. This is where the importance of creativity comes in. Futurists

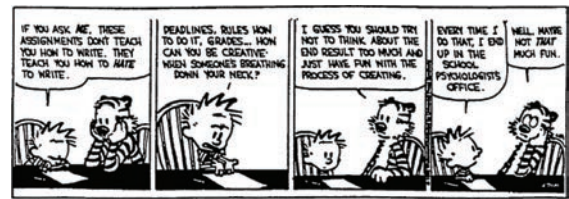


FIGURE 14.1

COMIC AND CARTOON © 2005 WARNER BROS. ENTERTAINMENT CO. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



FIGURE 14.2 Creativity isn't a gift for a chosen few. It is a birthright for everyone. The renowned Blue Man Group show has been described as a visual and sensory extravaganza, just one example of people who have put their creative talents to use. You can, too, in a way that empowers you.



FIGURE 14.3 If you think you're not creative, you'll prove yourself right. You may not be a Steve Jobs, but everyone has the makings of a creative person, including you!

agree that, given the state of the world today and the direction in which it appears to be headed, the inner resource of creativity and the skills of creative problem solving will be the most important coping strategy in the coming decade.

Creativity can help make order out of chaos. It has the ability to make change palatable, even enjoyable. But to be creative takes the right attitude and a workable strategy. The ability to be creative resides within each and every one of us. Creativity is not a gift—it is a human birthright (FIG. 14.2). But like muscles that atrophy with disuse, creativity must be exercised to be effective. For those of you who have let your creative abilities slip into hibernation, here is a refresher course in the basics (FIG. 14.3).

Think Like da Vinci!

When lists are compiled of the world's most brilliant, creative minds, Leonardo da Vinci is found at the top of many lists. A painter, inventor, scientist, and philosopher, and a man many consider ahead of his time, da Vinci is revered as a genius by everyone, including Michael Gelb. So impressed was Gelb with da Vinci's creative genius that he pooled da Vinci's talents into a book, *How to Think Like da Vinci*, so that the rest of the world could rise a few steps in creative consciousness by emulating the Italian. Among the many tips in Gelb's book are the following:

1. Be curious about how things work; don't take everything for granted; ask questions.

2. Make a habit of using all five of your senses to explore the world.
3. Be willing to embrace ambiguity, paradox, and uncertainty.
4. Be willing to make mistakes and learn from them.

The Creative Process

The creative process is not complex, but it is wonderfully profound because there are so many possible ways to get from point A to point B. During the 1980s, intense interest in the human creative process developed. And like the goose that was cut open to find out how she laid the golden egg, the creative process has since been examined from every side, angle, and perspective and has been dissected and inspected. Unlike the goose, though, the process wasn't killed; instead, it has become well understood so that the creative muscle could flex with strength, power, and agility for the whim and benefit of those anxious to use it.

The creative process has two parts, which by no coincidence match the functions of the right and left hemispheres of the human brain. Torrance described the creative process as a combination of both divergent (expansive possibilities, right-brain) and convergent (collective synthesis, left-brain) thinking processes.

The best creativity comes from using both sets of cognitive skills, both sides of your brain. Maslow observed a number of characteristics contributing to total well-being, or as he called it, self-actualization. Creativity was among these characteristics. In his later work on self-actualization, Maslow concluded that the creative process and the path to self-actualization were one and the same. He called the creative process the "art of being happily lost in the present moment." He divided the creative process into *primary* and *secondary* parts. **Primary creativity** is the origin of ideas: the playground of the mind where ideas are generated and hatched. **Secondary creativity** describes the strategic plan to bring to fruition the ideas brought forth in primary creativity. Secondary creativity is like the mind's workshop: a place to saw, chisel, glue, hammer, and polish ideas.

Players on the Creativity Team

Creative consultant Roger von Oech took Maslow's idea one step further, dividing primary and secondary creativity each into two phases in what is considered the best description of the creative process. In his celebrated book, *A Kick in the Seat of the Pants*, von Oech's model of creative thinking includes a team of four players—the **explorer**, **artist**, **judge**, and **warrior**. The explorer and artist provide primary creativity, and the judge and warrior provide secondary creativity. The explorer and artist team together for what von Oech calls the germination phase of

creativity. In this phase, inspiration and imagination are used to their fullest potential. The germination phase involves soft, pliable, right-brain thinking. Examples of this thinking style include irrationality, nonlinear perceptions, synthesis, metaphor, dreams, humor, and global awareness. The judge and warrior join forces in the harvesting of the creative crops sowed in the depths of imagination. The harvest phase of creativity involves hard, critical, left-brain thinking. Examples include logic, rationality, linear analysis, and factual thinking. Each type of thinking style has an equal responsibility in the creative process. The key is to let each player do his job without interference from the other three. In the footsteps of von Oech, Charles M. Johnson, founder of the Institute for Creative Development, delineates the creative process as a combination of creative differentiation and creative integration. Like von Oech, he divides the creative process into four stages: (1) incubation, (2) inspiration, (3) perspiration, and (4) administration (Johnson, 2005).

The overall goal of creative thought is to sharpen the skills of all four team players so that one or two aspects don't overpower the others, cause them to atrophy, and stifle the entire process. Let us take a more detailed look at the members of the creative team.

The Explorer. Although some ideas may actually bubble to the surface of consciousness, the human mind generally needs to be stimulated. If the mind is like a field, it needs frequent fertilization for robust growth of ideas. In the words of Nobel Prize winner Linus Pauling, "The best way to get a good idea is to get a lot of ideas," and to get a lot of ideas you need to look around. Whether abstract or concrete, the construction of almost everything requires raw materials. The explorer searches for raw materials with which to create ideas. People tend to get into cognitive ruts. We become prisoners of familiarity, unwilling to leave our turf, and the consequence is boredom and burnout. The walls of security can become the bars of imprisonment. As a result, our ability to create becomes obstructed. Where should you explore? Anywhere and everywhere; the possibilities are limitless. Bookstores, national parks, museums, magazines, rock concerts, libraries. Leave your territory and go explore a new environment. Make an adventure out of it. In the spirit of *Star Trek*, "Go where no one has ever gone before."

Singer/surfer Jack Johnson goes exploring by reading books by Kurt Vonnegut and Joseph Campbell. In an interview in *Rolling Stone* magazine, Johnson said, "A lot of artists fall into a thing where they're constantly trying to create art. But I think you can forget to take

Primary creativity: Maslow's term for the first stage of the creative process in which ideas are conceived.

Secondary creativity: Maslow's term for the last stage of the creative process in which a strategy is played out to have the selected idea come to fruition.

Explorer: Von Oech's term to identify the first stage of the creative process in which one begins to look for new ideas by venturing outside one's comfort level.

Artist: Von Oech's term to identify the second stage of the creative process, in which one plays with or incubates ideas that the explorer has brought back.

Judge: Von Oech's term to identify the third stage of the creative process, in which one selects the best idea and prepares it for manifestation.

Warrior: The last stage in von Oech's creative process template, in which the idea is taken to the street and campaigned to the rest of the world for its merits.

things in. You've got to fill up your mind" (Scaggs, 2008). Rock singer Sting shared that, when looking for inspiration for his albums, he turned to several volumes of Shakespeare and other notable classics in his beloved library and, using poetic license, exploited them to come up with new lyrics to his songs. Examples like this abound in the arts and humanities. The most important equipment the explorer needs, then, is an open mind: a container in which to put the raw materials. If you explore with a closed mind, there will be no room to transport the makings of ideas to your mental workshop. Negative thoughts, too, close a mind watertight. An open mind employs several attitudes to act as fertilizer; among these are curiosity, optimism, and enthusiasm. Curiosity is permission to get lost. In fact, many explorers do get lost. And when they emerge from the "woods," often they have discovered something far different, and more important, than what they had set out to find. Columbus was looking for spices in the Far East and "discovered" a whole new hemisphere. Roger Sperry was looking for a cure for epilepsy and discovered how the left and right hemispheres of the brain process information. Chef "Crusty" George Crumb was looking for a faster way to cook French fries (to please his customers), and he ended up with the potato chip. Alexander Graham Bell set out to create a hearing aid for his girlfriend and invented the telephone instead. Facebook creator Mark Zuckerberg wanted to design a dating Web site for Harvard students and instead created the most popular social networking site on the Internet. Exploration should be fun. Fun is generated from optimism, a positive outlook, and enthusiasm, the application of optimism. When doubt or fear is introduced, fun disappears and the mind closes up like a steel trap. Another important piece of equipment for the explorer is a notebook or pad of paper. Good ideas are like butterflies: They may land, but they soon take off again. Write them down!

The Artist. Poet William Blake once said that every individual is "an artist, a child, a poet, and an animal." Although you may not consider yourself the likes of Picasso or Rembrandt, every individual has what it takes to be an artist. In the role of the artist, you cultivate, manipulate, and sometimes incubate the raw materials gathered for ideas until they are molded into functional use. The role of the artist is perhaps the most challenging. It also takes some dedication and persistence. If the explorer asks *Where?* then the artist asks *How?* and *What?* How can I adapt other ideas for my own use? What can I do to make this idea my own?

A creativity course was introduced into the College of Business at Stanford University years ago in response to the criticism that American business lacked creativity. In their 1986 best-selling book *Creativity in Business*, Michael Ray and Rochelle Myers highlight this aspect of the creative process by including a chapter entitled "Ask Dumb Questions." To the artist, questions are the paintbrush and canvas; to the architect, questions are the pencil and tape measure. Questions probe for the seeds of solution. You can begin by asking "What if?" questions (and not all of these have turned out to be dumb!). Consider these examples: What if we made a music video with musicians dancing on treadmills? What if you could store and play music from 5,000 CDs in one small handheld device? What if a car ran on solar power rather than gas? What might seem like a dumb question now may hold the answer to a nagging problem down the road. Regarding the creative process, there is no such thing as a dumb question. "Dumb" questions shift the train of thought from the left (analytical) to the right (receptive) hemisphere of the brain, and receptivity is needed to play with the raw materials of thought. What if? questions are as valuable a tool to the artist as the compass and map are to the explorer. Asking *What if?* questions gives permission to manipulate and tailor ideas. Sometimes being an artist means being ridiculous, turning thoughts upside down or inside out. To an artist, paint, clay, plaster, and bronze are some of the media with which to create. In the creative process, there are many cognitive media as well. Thinking styles to manipulate ideas include reversing the perspective on concepts (e.g., throwing a barbecue for Christmas), connecting ideas together (a squirt gun and toothpaste), or comparisons (life is like a tea bag—you don't know your strength until you're put in hot water). And here is some food for thought: Picasso once said that "every act of creation first involves an act of destruction." Ideas that worked well in one situation may not be applicable to other circumstances; however, they can be adapted to the situation at hand.

The Judge. When the role of the judge comes into play, a shift from soft to hard thinking takes place. The crops are ready to be harvested. The judge decides thumbs up or thumbs down for each idea, with the good ideas becoming reality. The role of judge is crucial, for it can just as easily destroy good ideas as bring them to fruition. In American culture, the judge is usually the strongest player on the creative team. More often than not, in fact, the strength of the judge overwhelms and destroys the team. Rational thought and overanalysis used at the wrong time

are a waste of both time and resources. To kill or use an idea before it has been manipulated by the artist's hands is like walking out of the middle of the best movie you ever saw. You wouldn't do that. Neither would you make a habit of eating unripe fruit. As a rule, Americans are "top-heavy" in judgment to the detriment of the other necessary aspects of the creative process. In the Stanford creativity course mentioned previously, one of the first concepts students were taught was to "unlearn" judgment skills. Judgment in the germination stage of creativity is unhealthy. Later on, in the secondary phase of creativity, judgment skills are reassembled and strengthened. The skill of intuition is also emphasized. Although intuition is regarded as a right-brain function, it serves as a bridge to left-brain thinking. Intuition is the quarterback in the football game of creativity.

The role of judge involves taking risks. As inventor Grace Hopper once said, "A ship in a port is safe, but that's not what ships are built for." To that we can add this advice from business executive Harry Gray: "No one ever achieved greatness by playing it safe" (von Oech, 1986). Risk taking can seem like a dangerous proposition because there is always the possibility of failure. Failure, of course, can prove painful, a sensation the ego would rather avoid. With failure is the chance of rejection, and rejection tends to lower self-esteem. This may sound incongruous, but failure is the first step to success. Edison tried 1,800 different types of filaments before he found one that worked in the light bulb. Author Mario Puzo approached nineteen different publishers before he found one that would accept his manuscript entitled *The Godfather*. Contrary to popular opinion, failure isn't lack of achievement—it is lack of effort. In the words of comedian and film producer/director Woody Allen, "If you're not failing every now and again, it's a sign that you're not trying anything innovative."

Risks can be classified as either good or bad. With a little bit of intelligence, a calculation can be made regarding the strength of an idea. A good judge weighs the positive aspects against the negative ones. A good judge isn't biased by assumptions that preclude future possibilities. In the event of a calculated risk that sours, failure can still be a great teacher. Use your intuition and go with the good risks.

The Warrior. Giving the green light to go ahead with a good idea doesn't signify the end of the creative process. As von Oech explains, the role of the warrior is to campaign for the idea. It tries the idea out and markets it. The warrior is the anchor leg of the creative relay team,

and it doesn't take any coaching experience to figure out that the anchor leg has got to be strong. Many good ideas sit around collecting dust because the warrior never finished the race. The role of the warrior, in tandem with the judge, is to take creative ideas to completion. The warrior devises a strategy, a winning game plan. On Wall Street, the importance of strategy and campaigning is summed up as follows: To know and not to do is not to know. Warrior skills include good organization and administration abilities. The warrior also takes risks, but good risks. To be a good warrior, you need strength and endurance—strength to carry the idea to reality, and endurance to carry it far, if need be. A good warrior is an optimist. A good warrior has confidence. And a good warrior is persistent (FIG. 14.4).

A quick review of books on creativity reveals that although women are just as creative as men, they rarely receive any acknowledgments. Madame Curie, Fanny Mendelssohn, and Georgia O'Keeffe notwithstanding, women receive little if any credit for their creative efforts. In her book *The 12 Secrets of Highly Creative Women*, author Gail McMeekin not only highlights scores of creative women and their achievements over the past few centuries, but also notes the trends that got them to success. Like von Oech, McMeekin sees the creative process in distinct stages. Some of the twelve secrets include acknowledging your creative self, following your fascinations, conquering your saboteurs, and selecting empowering alliances.

Author Jonah Lehrer has a different take on the creative process through his examination of companies on the vanguard of creativity, from 3M and Google to Apple. Many companies recognize the importance of the creative thought process and encourage this in their employees both on and off the clock. (Despite the fact that Lehrer was too creative with the first chapter turning fact to fiction, *Imagine: How Creativity Works* offers a unique look at how the corporate world values the creative process.)

The Myths of Creativity

In the cut-throat global marketplace where good ideas equate with big bucks, corporate America lauds the flexing of the creative muscle. In an effort to better understand the creative process in corporate America, Harvard MBA professor Teresa Amabile (2005) shattered some common myths about creativity by reading 12,000 journal entries of 238 corporate employees across