

Why do we laugh?

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Laughter plays a crucial role in every culture across the world, but it's not clear why laughter exists. A new [study](#) published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences involving a group of researchers led by Gregory Bryant at UCLA suggests that laughter may indicate to listeners the friendship status of those laughing. The researchers asked listeners to judge the friendship status of pairs of strangers and friends based on short snippets of their simultaneous laughter. Drawn from 24 different societies, they found that listeners were able to reliably distinguish friends from strangers, based on specific acoustic characteristics of the laughter.

Spontaneous laughter, which is unintentionally triggered by conversation or events, emerges in the first few months of life, even in children who are deaf or blind. Laughter not only transcends human cultural boundaries, but species boundaries, too: it is present in a similar form in other great apes. In fact, the evolutionary origins of human laughter can be traced back to between [10 and 16m years ago](#).

While laughter has been linked to [higher pain tolerance and the signalling of social status](#), its principal function appears to be creating and deepening social bonds. As our ancestors began to live in larger and more complex social structures, the quality of relationships became crucial to survival. The process of evolution would have favored the development of cognitive strategies that helped form and sustain these cooperative alliances.

Read full, original post: [Laughter's Evolutionary Past](#)