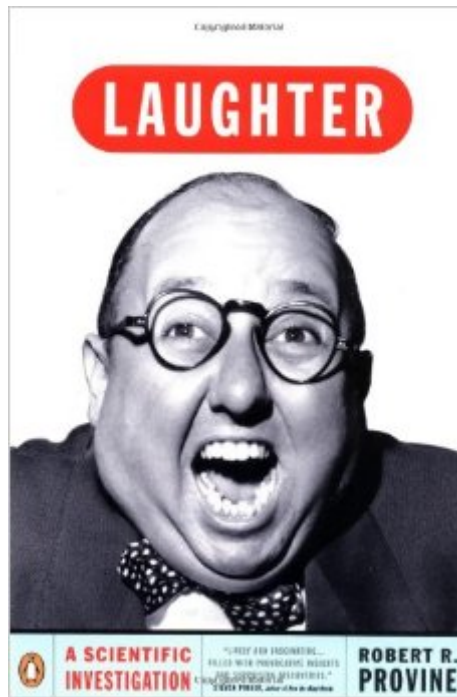


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# Laughter: A Scientific Investigation



## Synopsis

Do men and women laugh at the same things? Is laughter contagious? Has anyone ever really died laughing? Is laughing good for your health? Drawing upon ten years of research into this most common-yet complex and often puzzling-human phenomenon, Dr. Robert Provine, the world's leading scientific expert on laughter, investigates such aspects of his subject as its evolution, its role in social relationships, its contagiousness, its neural mechanisms, and its health benefits. This is an erudite, wide-ranging, witty, and long-overdue exploration of a frequently surprising subject.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 3.1 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (20 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

Don't expect to get lots of laughs by just reading *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation* (Viking) by Robert R. Provine. It's not merely that Provine is covering a serious subject. He is as good as his word: his book is a scientific investigation, and he is neuroscientist by profession who has done original research on laughter published in such non-newsstand rags as *Ethology* and *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society*. And it's not that Provine is an unentertaining, dour writer; he has a light touch, and good explicative skills, he is happy to share a joke, and his stories about some of the ways he has done experiments are funny. For instance, we can share his bemusement over his initial explorations of why people laugh; he got a group into a clinic and played them funny tapes. He failed to get anything but a few chuckles. It was his first demonstration that laughter was a social behavior, not a laboratory one. He went on to study people in social situations. Similarly, the reason you can't expect to laugh much from reading Provine's book is found in the book itself. Laughter is

not something you can most reliably expect to do alone reading a book; it is something we do as a social behavior. Its "sociality," the ratio of social to solitary performance of the act, is very high. Provine had his undergraduate students keep logs of their behavior, including laughing, and found that we are thirty times more likely to laugh when with someone else. Another study showed that eye contact between two companions increases the likelihood of laughter. Laughter has a nonlinguistic role of holding people together.

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