

Colorado

# CAFÉ SCIENTIFIQUE

Tuesday 10 May 2011

at the Wynkoop Brewing Company

<http://www.wynkoop.com/>

Corner of 18<sup>th</sup> and Wynkoop in LoDo, Denver

About a block from Light Rail. Thirteen minutes by foot from Auraria.

## What Makes Things Funny?

**A. Peter McGraw, PhD**

Leeds School of Business, University of Colorado Boulder

Peter McGraw is Assistant Professor of Marketing in the Leeds School of Business, and Assistant Professor of Psychology, University of Colorado Boulder, where he directs the Humor Research Lab, fetchingly abbreviated as HuRL; its major question is, What makes things funny? Humor is an important, ubiquitous phenomenon; however, seemingly disparate conditions seem to facilitate humor. In McGraw's group's theory, they integrate these conditions by suggesting that laughter and amusement result from violations that are simultaneously seen as benign. They investigated three conditions that make a violation benign and thus humorous: (a) the presence of an alternative norm suggesting that the situation is acceptable, (b) weak commitment to the violated norm, and (c) psychological distance from the violation. Five experimental studies showed that benign moral violations tend to elicit laughter and amusement in addition to disgust. Furthermore, seeing a violation as both wrong and not wrong mediates behavioral displays of humor. This account is consistent with evolutionary accounts of laughter, explains humor across many domains, and suggests that humor can accompany negative emotion.

***EVERYONE IS WELCOME.*** The discussion starts at 6:30 in the Mercantile Room (no food service there). Come before 6 PM to leave yourself time to get something to eat, or stay and eat afterwards. We end around 8 PM.

There's no charge. The Wynkoop is generously providing the facility; we buy our own drinks. It is first come, first seated, and **seating is limited** so that everyone can take part in the discussion.

The Colorado Café Scientifique is organized by an informal group of faculty from CU and institutions up and down the Front Range, as well as science fans from industry, government and elsewhere. We welcome your input, including ideas for speakers and topics. Bring them with you to the next Café, or e-mail them and any questions to [John.Cohen@UCDenver.edu](mailto:John.Cohen@UCDenver.edu)

**Essential information about the topic and the event on our Web site at:**  
**<http://CafeSciColorado.org>**