What Makes Us Chuckle? Age and Preferences for Comedy

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Why study aging and comedy?
Because older adults seem to watch fewer comedies and we wanted to figure out why!

Study 1. Nielsen TV ratings data from the 1970s and 1980s suggested that older adults, compared to younger adults, were less likely to watch TV situation comedies (Mares & Sun, 2010).

Study 2. Survey of 108 adults aged 18 – 85, asked to indicate their favorite TV programs & favorite TV characters.

Study 3. Survey of 1504 adults aged 18-86; Cox TV Guide-style description of different TV programs and asked to evaluate them.

Why might there be these age differences? There are two main theoretical accounts.

1. Socio-Emotional Selectivity Theory (Professor Laura Carstensen at Stanford University)
   - Emotional preferences change as perception of future time changes
     - More experiences, waiting for future, therefore
       - More emphasis on taking every minute count
       - More willingness to have incomplete experience for future gain.
   - Older: more career risks, therefore:
     - More strain on social and emotional affection, stability
     - Greater importance of meaningfulness.

2. Social Identity Theory (Professor Talya M. Lieb in the 2010s)
   - Sometimes we value the identity that comes from belonging to a group.
     - One group might be the sense of belonging to a particular group.
     - Perhaps we sometimes seek out interactions that are similar to our group, because this affects self-efficiency messages about the prevalence and social significance of those age groups.

We found support for this in Study 1, where we asked about dementia and TV viewing. Amongst people of the same age (or somewhat, for some would be, some a stronger predictor of age-related element than of younger adults' influence.

- In preschool-aged children, age might be very important. Older adults are very likely to be depressed. Older adults are more likely to be depressed. Older adults are more likely to be depressed.

What do you think?

What do you care about when you pick a film to watch?
Are there some types of comedies you like to watch? Some types you really avoid?
Do you think your comedy tastes have changed over time?