

My Therapy Success: Overcoming Inappropriate Joking and Homonymphobia

By rantingsenior

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Thank you, Dreamcatcher. Your great piece "Therapy" gave me the courage to share.

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As I looked at my new psychiatrist Dr. Milford, I could see the gears turning. He had one of those transparent clocks in front of him on his desk. I could also see that he was thinking about what I had said. "So," Dr. Milford said, "you are incapable of being serious about anything, you always act like a childish, boorish ass, and you alienate everyone with incessant silly, inane, inappropriate, immature jokes and antics. Correct?" "Yes, Doctor," I replied. "I prefer thinking of it as being in touch with my inner child, who sometimes gets a little out of control." "Was he out of control when he super-glued the cover of your ex mother-in-law's casket closed?" Dr. Milford asked. "She was always a very private person," I responded. "Despite what her daughter said, I knew she would want it that way. Besides, she never should have been dumb enough to let me convince her to get into it and try it out! After they got her out she was fine." "Was he out of control when he photo-shopped the long Pinocchio nose on your wife's Facebook profile picture the day before your divorce court appearance?" "It was a way to make a symbolic statement," I replied. "And I did her a favor. She'll never make the mistake of sharing her password with anyone again, including her new hubby. And most of her friends and their friends and their friends' friends really thought it was cool!" Dr. Milford scribbled down some notes. "What do you expect here?" Dr. Milford asked. "What do you want to get out of our sessions?" "Better material!" I replied. "Are you a good writer?" Dr. Milford shook his head. "If you can't make a serious effort, we can't accomplish anything," he observed. "If I could make a serious effort there would be nothing to accomplish!" I countered. "My problem is that I can't be serious about anything, including my own serious problem!" Even Dr. Milford had to concede the weird, convoluted validity of that point. "Fair enough," he said. "I guess this is going to be quite a challenge!" "O.K.," Dr. Milford continued. "Here's an idea. To get things going, to get you to focus a bit, let's try some simple word association exercises. I'll say a word, and you respond with whatever pops into your head." "I can't do that," I replied. "Why not?" Dr. Milford asked. "Because I have homonymphobia," I explained. "You don't mean homophobia?" the Doctor asked. "No, homonymphobia," I replied. "I'm afraid of homonyms." "How can you be frightened of homonyms?"

Dr. Milford queried. "Because of what they can do!" I explained. "Like, you might say 'hoard', spelled H,O,A,R,D, but I think you said 'horde', spelled H,O,R,D,E, and I respond 'Attila the Hun,' and you think I'm crazy and commit me." "I wouldn't worry about that," Dr. Milford responded. "Or you could say 'heard', spelled H,E,A,R,D, but I think it's 'herd,' spelled H,E,R,D, and I say 'buffalo chip,' and you think I'm nuts and commit me." "It won't be a problem," the Doctor said. "Did you say 'buffalo chip'?" "Or you might say 'soar,' S,O,A,R, but I think it's 'sore,' S,O,R,E, and I say 'scab' and you think I'm nuts and commit me! Wait!" I said. "A solution has just occurred to me!" "What is it?" Dr. Milford asked. "You could use the word in a sentence after you say it, and then I'll know exactly what the word is," I replied. "Can you give me an example?" Dr. Milford asked. "Sure," I said. "Let's say the word is 'mother.' You could look at me and say, The word is mother, as in 'I opened the bathroom door and accidentally saw my mother naked in the shower and was incredibly aroused!'" "Did that really happen to you?" Dr. Milford asked. "Did that encounter really occur?" "Kind of," I replied, "except I was aroused before I even opened the door! At fourteen I was constantly aroused! Most of my life I've been easily aroused. My ex-wife stopped my frequent erections. She straightened me out." The Doctor jotted down a few more notes. "Here's an alternate idea," Dr. Milford said. "What if I spell the words out? Then there will be no misunderstandings. Is that o.k. with you?" "It's okay with me," I said. "And just to reinforce the validity of my fear, when I say 'okay' I am always thinking O,K,A,Y, not O period K period like most people would. See how tricky homonyms can be? I'm just saying." Dr. Milford totally ignored my brilliant witticism. "Tough couch!" I observed. "Here we go," Dr. Milford said. "Now the whole idea is NOT to over-think or censor yourself. Just say whatever first pops into your mind. Don't think, be spontaneous." "I'll just shoot from the nip, Doc." I said. "I think you meant hip, not nip," the Doctor responded. "Wow! So that's why I get so many odd looks when I say that!" I commented. Dr. Milford ignored me again. "We'll try a simple word just for practice," Dr. Milford said. "Cow, spelled C,O,W." I stood up and faced the Doctor. "Pie," I said, "spelled P,I,E. Pie." I sat back down. "It's not a spelling bee in elementary school!" Dr. Milford said. "You don't have to stand up, say the word, spell it, repeat it, and then sit down." "I'm sorry," I replied. "I won't stand up and spell and repeat anymore." "And I must observe," Dr. Milford said, "that the two associations to words that I've heard from you so far are 'buffalo chip,' which you spontaneously volunteered earlier, and 'cow pie' now. Do you see the scatological consistency there?" "Is that really something you can see?" I asked. "And wouldn't it depend on what the buffalo and the cow ate?" "Let's just begin," Dr. Milford said. "The first word on the list is dog, spelled D,O,G. What pops into your mind?" "Arf," I replied as I giggled. "No it didn't," Dr. Milford said. "'Arf' did not come to mine. It is another of your silly jokes." "Yes it did!" I insisted. "No it did not," the Doctor said. "You see, 'dog' is like a trick test question in the word association game. Nine-nine point nine percent of human beings in the world respond 'cat' when they hear 'dog.' A few might say 'bark.' One or two might specify a particular breed or give the name of a pet. I have never heard anyone say 'Arf' in my thirty years of practice!" "Well you don't have to bark at me!" I observed. "O.K. I admit it. It was another silly joke. I'm sorry." Dr. Milford rolled his eyes. "Try to concentrate on the task at hand." Dr. Milford said. "The next word is uncle, spelled U,N,C,L,E." "Aunt." I responded. "Good!" Dr. Milford said. "You actually can focus. The

next word is 'aunt,'" Dr. Milford said. But he forgot to spell. "Aardvark!" I replied. "No," Dr. Milford said. "Did I forget to spell? I'm sorry. Not 'ant' A,N,T. 'Aunt' spelled A,U,N,T, like you responded before to uncle." "Mrs. Aardvark's sister!" I blurted out. I was pleased with myself. "Guess what," I said. "I think I set you up for that one, Doctor." "Guess what," Dr. Milford said. "What?" I asked. "Time is up and this session is over. You just paid me three hundred dollars to listen to your silly jokes for an hour! I think I set you up for that one!" I stopped giggling, and could not come up with anything funny to counter that! "Well," I said to myself, "at least he does have a sense of humor. For some reason, I think that amazing things may be in store for both of us." "I hope that you're right," I suddenly heard Dr. Milford say! "I like the foreshadowing. But I suggest that you speak to yourself more softly from now on when doing private internal ruminations." "Thanks for giving me something to chew on!" I quipped. Silence. "What does a cow's digestion have to do with anything?" I asked. Silence again. "Aren't you going to give me teat for tat?" Still silence. It was a really, really, really tough couch! ---end of Part I---
Interpart====> --Start of Part II--- Several weeks had passed. Although a great rapport had been established, little progress had been made. My initial optimism had begun to wane and I wasn't feeling as good about things either. But never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined what was about to unfold! (Reinforcement of prior foreshadowing.) "O.K." Dr. Milford said, "so far we have gotten nowhere. Let's approach this from another angle. I have a new technique I want to try. It's a little risky, but it might be more suited for your comedic personality." "Risky? What is it?" I asked. "And why is it risky?" "It's called 'double role play'," Dr. Milford responded. "And you're so far gone anyway, I don't think the risks even have to be considered!" "Ouch, Doc!" I said. "Good one! Double role play?" I asked. "Double role play?" I asked again. "Very funny," Dr. Milford responded. "I'll explain. You are going to role play both sides of a conversation. You will switch between one person and another sticking to the scenario that I will provide. You will be both characters, so to speak. If you get stuck, I'll try to nudge things along. Understand?" "Yes, Doc," I said. "Me too, Doc!" I suddenly responded as a second character in a high falsetto voice. "This sounds promising!" The Doctor did not look displeased. "O.K., here is the situation and I think your voices might come in handy!" he said. "Your hypothetical girlfriend is telling you that she is leaving you because you can never take anything seriously and you just make jokes about everything." "Does she have a name?" I asked. "It doesn't matter," the Doctor said. "If it will make it easier for you, give her a name." "Bob!" I said. "Short for Roberta! And I'll be Carol! I like that name. It was very popular for men in the early nineteen hundreds!" "So she will be called Bob, and you, the male, will be called Carol?" "Yes," I said. "And we have two kids, Ted and Alice!" "Don't make a mockery of this," the Doctor said. "I'm sorry," I said in my low voice. "I'm sorry too!" I said in the falsetto voice. "We'll both be serious from now on!" "I assume," the Doctor said, "that the low voice will be the man named Carol and the high voice will be the female Bob?" "Yes," I squeaked in my high voice. "The low voice is the man Carol. Isn't he a hunk?" "O.K.," the Doctor said, "let's begin. Bob, the female, you start. Express your unhappiness to Carol about his constant, inappropriate joking." I donned my high voice. "I hate you Carol, I hate you! I'm leaving you! You can't take anything seriously! All you do is make jokes about everything! I need more than that! I need comforting and support and understanding." "Very good!" the Doctor said. "And

how does Carol respond?" I went back to my normal lower male voice. "You need comforting and support and understanding? I am not a pillow, bra, or dictionary, Bob. I'm just a man!" I slipped back into the falsetto Bob voice. "See, that's what I mean, Carol! You make a stupid joke out of everything!" "Good," Dr. Milford said. "Really good. Continue." "Please don't go!" I said in the manly Carol voice. "Please, Bob, please don't leave me. You used to say that you loved that I could make you laugh! What happened? Why don't you like it anymore?" "Wonderful!" Doctor Milford said. "Excellent!" I resumed my falsetto female voice as Bob. "Because life is not all laughter, Carol. Because everything is not a joke! But you refuse to confront anything seriously! All of your energies go into avoiding the many serious things that you apparently can't cope with! Your fears make you incapable of addressing anything like a mature adult should. Instead, you just push things aside or deflect them with silly humor and your inappropriate joking!" "Truly fantastic!" Doctor Milford said. "Really fantastic! Carol, what is your response to that insight?" I thought a long, long while. I went blank. A minute went by. "Oh," I said in Carol's manly voice. "Oh?" Dr. Milford asked. "Just 'oh'? That's all you have to say? Might I suggest that's a bit inadequate? How do you think your girlfriend Bob would respond to just an 'oh'?" The Doctor's probe got me going again! He was brilliant! "Oh? All you can say is 'Oh,' Carol?" I said in Bob's falsetto voice. "That is your response to what I said? For heavens sake, Carol! Don't you see that your entire demeanor is just one big defense mechanism that exists to reduce anxieties? Don't you realize that the concomitant price you are paying is that your incessant, inappropriate joking makes you an emotional cripple who can't really relate to anyone about anything! Don't you understand that you are becoming someone who can't really cry or love or give or feel? That you are just a pathetic figure of a man, Carol, a sad soul devoid of real emotion who is incapable of sustaining any type of real relationship! Don't you realize that?" I fell silent again. I was speechless again! Bob, my fictional girlfriend, had become my alter-ego, capable of saying all the things that I could not say myself! But I could not respond. After about thirty seconds, the Doctor prodded me again. "Well," Dr. Milford said, "what does Carol have to say now? How does he respond to Bob's analysis?" "Oh, oh." I said in my low male voice. "It's double role-play, so I did two oh's." Again Dr. Milford showed his genius! "Two 'ohs' are just not good enough," Dr. Milford said. "You must face the issues Bob has raised. What does Carol the man think and feel right now?" I was still silent. "Or," Dr. Milford suggested, "how must his girlfriend and lover Bob feel after hearing just two 'ohs' after all that she has said?" The Doctor was incredible! I immediately began speaking again as my girlfriend Bob in falsetto. "Is that all you can say, Carol? Two 'ohs'? Is that all you have to say to me after everything that I have said to you? For heavens sake! Don't you think that you owe me more than two oh's?" And suddenly the emotional damn broke! Suddenly psychic energy that for decades had gone into maintaining avoidance and repression was redirected constructively! Suddenly Carol's self-insight began to grow geometrically with each second! And at last he could speak! "No!" Carol's voice boomed out. "No!" he proclaimed. "That is not all I have to say, Bob. I am not the one that doesn't see. It is YOU that do not see!" Everyone in the room knew something important was about to happen. Bob responded in her falsetto voice, "Oh Carol, what on earth do you mean?" Dr. Milford was beaming. He knew his instincts had been right. "This is terrific!" he shouted. "Carol this is your

moment. Go for it!" Carol now spoke with a slow, confident, purposeful rhythm. "Oh my darling Bob," Carol began. "Do I see all the misery and pain in the world! Of course I do! Do I see your unique pain and misery clearly? Of course I do! Do I understand that there is more to life than making jokes about everything, and that my incessant silly joking upsets you and everyone else! Of course I do! Am I not a man? If you prick me do I not bleed?" "I think Carol might want to ease off the poetic stuff," Dr. Milford suggested. "I agree!" Bob's falsetto voice resounded. "There is no need to bring pricks into this!" Carol continued. "Oh, Bob. Could I hold you and comfort you and give you verbal support and help you face the trials and tribulations in your life? Of course I could. But I choose not to. Because I care about you and love you too much to do that!" "That doesn't make any sense at all," Dr. Milford interjected with a quizzical look. It triggered an instantaneous response by Bob. Another testimonial to the Doctor's skill! "That doesn't make any sense at all!" Bob's falsetto voice rang out. "You love me too much to treat me like a human being?" "It does make sense, Bob," Carol continued. "It makes perfect sense! You see, when I jokingly belittle anything that you say or do, I am being true to myself. I am self-actualizing. But it is you, Bob, that makes that possible! You allow me to be me despite the fact that it irritates you! Now think about that. What does that make you? It makes you the giving, sacrificing, nurturing, compassionate and admittedly superior person that you aspire to be!" "Oh, Carol," Bob said in her high voice. "I'm trying so hard to understand. Please make it clearer to me." "Yes, Carol," Dr. Milford said. "Please make it clearer to both of us!" "Let me put it another way," Carol said in his manly voice. "My persistent boorish childish behavior invariably elicits adult, noble, self-sacrificing behavior from you, Bob! Each time it does, you observe yourself being noble and understanding and giving. And after seeing yourself act that way, your psyche correctly deduces that you are that way! And every time you see yourself act that way, it reinforces your deserved high self-esteem! My constant immature silliness always evoking your mature, caring tolerance let's you continuously validate and self-reinforce your own positive self-image! Because you repeatedly see how wonderful you are, you rightfully feel wonderful about yourself! And that could never happen if I were not the immature fop that I am!" "Oh, Carol," Bob said, "I think I am beginning to understand!" Carol continued on. "You are my perfect foil, and I am your perfect fool!" he said to Bob. "And I shall forever be both foishly and foolishly in love with you!" Dr. Milford's jaw dropped. My girlfriend Bob was also silent. A good fifteen seconds went by before Dr. Milford spoke again. "What scares me," Dr. Milford said, "is that I'm trying to figure out if what you said could possibly make any sense!" And then, as only a true therapeutic genius could, Dr. Milford interjected another fantastic prod. "Does anybody have anything else to say?" Dr. Milford asked. It was an elegantly simple query yet so powerful in its effect! For it allowed for the proverbial pickle on top of the rhubarb pie! Bob's falsetto female voice immediately rang out! "Oh Carol," Bob said. "I never thought of things that way! You are a truly passionate and brilliant man! By constantly acting like a boorish ass, you give me the greatest gift that one can bestow....positive self-esteem stemming from continuously reinforced self-awareness of my own compassionate magnificence! Please, my darling. Hold me! Kiss me! I am getting so hot! Let's just stay home in bed for a week and take turns performing oral sex on each other!" Dr. Milford's jaw dropped again, but his mouth was open much wider than before. With maw

agape, he looked at Bob and me in silence for at least a full two minutes. We both just stared back at him. It was another three minutes before he finally spoke. "I don't think that I can help you," Dr. Milford said. "In fact, you have made me question if I can ever help anyone!" It was that comment that precipitated the ultimate irony! It made me realize that I was cured! For when Dr. Milford said it, I felt both his sincerity and his pain! I knew that it was a time to be serious! I understood that at that precise moment, Dr. Milford deserved and needed perfect honesty, clarity, closure, and support. I, Carol, took it upon myself to give the Doctor all of those things as Bob watched. "I understand exactly how you feel, Doctor." I said. "Doctor, please listen carefully. You must believe what I am about to say. You have helped me, so there is no need to feel badly. Right now, I can feel your anguish. I can now respond to it appropriately. I am cured, and you did it!" A little drool fell from the Doctor's mouth which was still agape. "Doctor," I said, "you have succeeded where all others have failed. Now it is simply time for us to say 'bye,' spelled B,Y,E. I don't want you to think I'm talking about buying stocks which would be spelled B,U,Y, by-the-way, the latter of course being spelled B,Y." Dr. Milford's mouth remained open. "You have helped me too!" Bob's falsetto female voice rang out. "I shall never forget you." Bob and I got up and headed for the door holding hands. Bob got a bit frisky. "Please, Bob," I said. "Don't touch me that way in front of Dr. Milford." Dr. Milford was silent. But as we reached the door, he suddenly composed himself and shouted, "Wait!" "What is it?" Bob's falsetto voice asked. Dr. Milford responded. "I've thought about it. I've decided that both of you are right! Be advised.....I'm sending you both bills!" That was decades ago. Bob and I still laugh when we recall it today.