

Gentlemen: Activate Your Zygomaticii

In the last few weeks, I have been indulging in one of my favorite pastimes, human anatomy and how it relates to my favorite hobby, barbershop. I am unable to leave this area until I have discussed the smile. The anatomy of the smile is fairly straightforward, the psychology is not. So let us plunge into the anatomy this month and leave the psychology for a later time.

To keep life simple, we will forget such accessory things as laugh lines about the eyes and confine our remarks to the muscles of facial expression about the mouth. There are nine of these and they all contribute to the shape of the mouth and, just incidentally how other people perceive how you are relating to them.

Quadratus labii superioris:
elevates the upper lip,
expression of contempt
and disdain.

Caninus:
produces the nasolabial
furrow, think Susan
Hampshire.

Zygomaticus:
draws the angle of the
mouth backward and
upward as in laughing.

Risorius:
retracts the angle of the
mouth as in snarling.

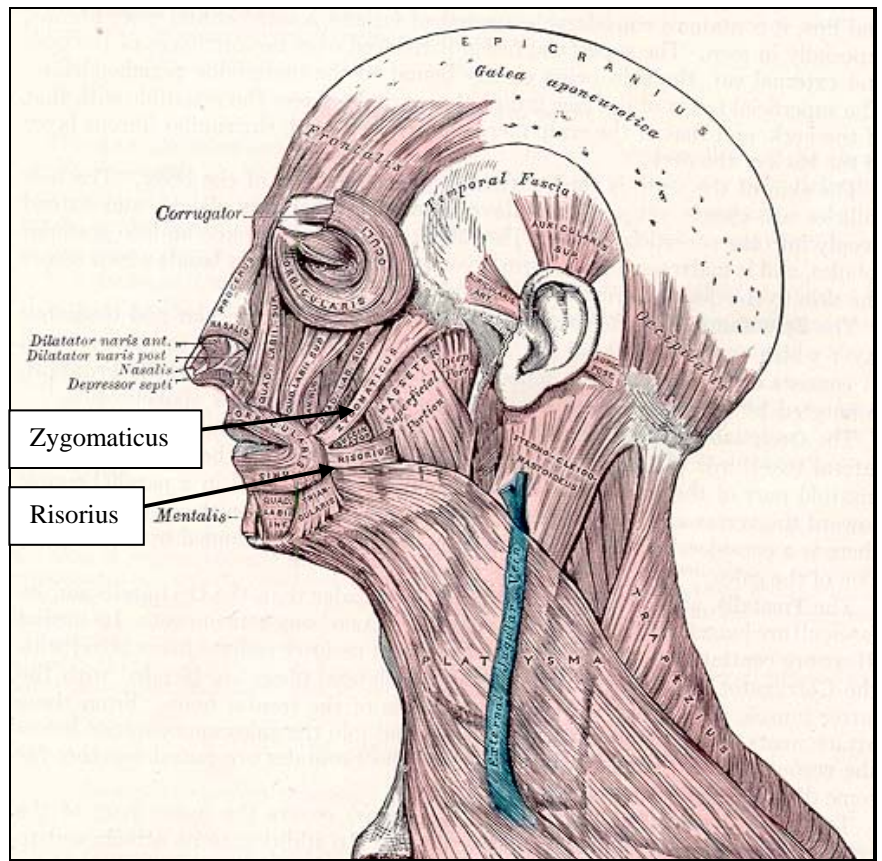
Quadratus labii inferioris:
draws the lower lip down
and to the side as in irony.

Triangularis:
depresses the angle of the
mouth in a frown.

Mentalis:
raises and protrudes the lower lip
and wrinkles the chin, expressing doubt or disdain.

Orbicularis oris: closes the lips.

Buccinator: forms the cheek muscles and keeps the food from “Chipmunking”. (I don’t know what happened to Mile Davis’ buccinator.)



This is an over-simplified view of the anatomy of the situation as in reality the muscles are not well defined but tend to meld together with a corresponding blending of their actions. I seem to remember reading somewhere that it was much easier for men to activate their risorius giving them a more aggressive look than their zygomaticus which would give them a non-threatening and smiling look. Women, on the other hand, seem to do the reverse, favoring the come-hither smile over the stay away look. It is good for us they did so, or our species would have died out years ago as we all sat around the campfire, flexing our risorii and glaring at each other. We do, however, show the

remains of this aggressive (and ?more primitive behavior) today. There is nothing like looking at a barbershop chorus, “smiling” away. Run down the row and see what muscle group is winning, the zygomaticii or the risorii. Is the singer approachable or do you want to avoid him at all costs?

It is amazing how sensitive we all are to very minute changes in facial expression. You all knew when your kids were sick. One of the signs that you were very aware of was that their eyes were “glazed” or “weak”. But just what is a “glazed” or “weak” eye? You know what it is, you can see it from across the room. There is certainly something in the general demeanor of the child that tells us he or she is sick but it is the eyes that we focus on. My feeling is that we are so tuned in on the eyes that we recognize when the dilatation of the pupil and focus point of the eyes is inappropriate. We are talking about one or two millimeters or even fractions of millimeters. The fighter in the ring just before the TKO is announced (The medical term for TKO is concussion. Boxing is a bizarre sport.) may be stumbling about but I believe the crowd is also aware that he has lost his focal point.

The muscles that control this focal point might be divided into two types. Voluntary muscles which you can control, you can move your eyes from side, and involuntary muscles which you cannot control, the eye muscles that constrict and dilate the pupil. It is interesting to note that with biofeedback, people have been taught to control things previously thought to be uncontrollable. They can heat up one hand as opposed to the other and some have been able to heat up one finger without changing the temperatures in the other fingers on the same hand. I learned how to clear (“pop”) one ear at a time when I was SCUBA diving. Don’t ask me how to do it, I can’t tell you. I learned from necessity to make what was thought to be in involuntary action a voluntary one.

The muscles of the facial expression are, for the most part, under voluntary control. There are certain reflexes and conditioned responses, however, that in some situations make our expression involuntary. Think of a strong sneeze for the latter and facial expressions at a funeral for the former. One can learn to override these involuntary expressions. Think of the poker player who has just drawn a winning hand. Instead of communicating ecstasy and joy, you would think his wife had just run off with the Fuller Brush man.

We must learn how to smile and make it a genuine smile. This is not just a baring of the teeth. Remember the campfire? And it is not a practiced insincerity. You must like this hobby or you wouldn’t put yourself through all this. The smile has to come from inside, an inner happiness. We are all happy guys. We just have to learn to show it, to put our heart on our sleeve. Like biofeedback, it will take practice. If I can “pop” one ear at a time, I must surely be able to activate my zygomaticus more than my risorius.

So get out your mirror, look at your self and smile. Do you believe yourself? If you can’t sell yourself, you sure as hell can’t sell an audience. They can spot a phony from the 10th row. Try it again, think of one of Gerry’s latest jokes, - no, think of something funny. There were these two cannibals having lunch...

Bernard Martin
VP Music
May 2003